

## Chapter 1

"Haven't you always wanted a snorkack?"

Sirius came to an abrupt halt as he walked into the living room. Harry, Hermione and Sally were sat on the floor, and Hermione had a large writing pad in her hands.

"Why a snorkack?" Hermione looked at Sally questioningly.

"Because an actomantula would be too big, and an owl would be too small"

"Oh - okay" She looked up and spotted Sirius "Hi, Uncle Mike"

"Hello Min" Sirius stared at her for a moment "Are we getting a pet?" They all stared at him, then Hermione laughed and held up the pad she was holding. He leaned over, and read the first words on the page "If I Had A Million Galleons?"

"It kind of started as a joke" Harry replied "But after a while we realised it might work"

"We were just working on the last verse" Sally added, then continued "Although we skipped a lot of other lines" She smiled at the look on his face "But enough about us - how can we help you?"

"I just received this from Minister Fudge" He held up an envelope "He has invited us - the seven of us - to The Quidditch World Cup as his guests"

"Wow" Hermione said, then frowned "Even my parents?"

"Yes - I guess he thought leaving them out would be too obvious"

"That was nice of him" She smiled "But they are going on a second honeymoon this summer, and will be away until mid-August"

"But you will still come?" Harry asked, and smiled when Hermione nodded.

"Sally - would Susan like to join us?"

"I can go and ask her!" Sally jumped to her feet, and bounded over to the fireplace, and vanished in a puff of flames.

While they were waiting for her to return, Sirius walked up behind Hermione and started reading over her shoulder.

"Like a fat lady or a Weasley?" He snorted in disbelief.

"Well - this isn't a finished version, obviously" Harry was saved from further explanations by another flash of green fire, and the arrival of Sally and her mother in the living room.

"So - Auntie Sue - will you be coming with us?" Harry asked.

"Oh yes" She smiled back, then she gave him a letter "This came for you just before Sally came to get me"

"Did you..."

"Yes - I checked for portkeys and so on. I think it's from the Weasleys"

"Oh joy" Harry smirked, then opened it and read it through.

"So?" Sally asked.

"They would like to invite me to be their guest at The Cup, and then spend the summer with them" He smiled "It seems that Mr Weasley got some tickets from work as well"

"And let me guess" Hermione looked at him "They only have one ticket spare"

"Of course" He handed the letter to Sally, then turned to Susan "If I write a quick reply, would you be able to send it back for me?"

"Of course"

"Thanks" He turned to his Uncle "So - when is it?"

"Two weeks - the day after your birthday - so, if it is alright with everyone, I would say we spend the night here, then go to The Ministry the next morning, and leave from there" He smiled "Then we camp over night, and return the following day"

“Urgh! Camping!” Hermione moaned, then saw the amused looks on their faces “What?”

“Oh - you’ll see”

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“Is everyone ready?” The five of them had flocked to The Ministry, and were stood in front of Fudge “The portkey will send you to the stadium, and you can set up your tent. I will be along later - I have some work to finish here, but I will be there for the start of the match”

“Thank you Minister” Susan replied.

“Call me Cornelius”

“Thank you, Cornelius”

“You are welcome” He held up his wand, then looked at them “Ready?” They all nodded “Then I will see you later” He tapped the portkey, and a moment later they all felt a tug, and then appeared in a field.

“Have I mentioned how much I HATE portkeys?” Harry moaned, picking himself up off the floor.

“Well - if summer goes as planned, we should be able to teach you another way to travel” Sirius smiled “But, for now, I think we can walk the rest of the way” He pointed to his left, and then turned just in time to see a sparkle of stars shoot up over the ridge.

“Someone’s getting excited” Susan smirked “The Ministry must be working overtime on the wards”

“Wards?” Sally asked.

“Anti-muggle wards, notice-me-not wards and so on” Hermione replied “This is, apparently, the largest single magical structure after The Ministry and Hogwarts”

“Cool” Harry looked around, then followed Sirius as he lead them towards the camp site.

Five minutes later, the three kids were looking around in wonder. There were small tents as far as the eye could see, and in the distance there was a huge stadium.

"Wow" Harry said again, as they passed another well decked out Irish tent.

"Impressive, isn't it?" Susan smiled at the expressions on their faces.

"I've never seen anything like it" Hermione beamed. Then, as they came to a stop, she stared at the tent in front of her.

"Min?"

"We are staying in this?" She gestured to the small tent.

"Minnie - what have you been learning for the last three years?" Harry smirked. Hermione looked at him, then at the tent, then back at Harry.

"Really?"

"Really" He watched as first Hermione, then Sally and Susan went in. He turned to Sirius and smiled "If you will excuse the phrase, and the repetition , but magic really does have its Perks"

"Yes" Sirius laughed "It does"

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"Sally?"

"Oh joy" Sally turned at the voices behind them "Hello Ginny. Ron. Weasleys"

"What are you doing here?" Ron asked, glaring at her.

"We were invited" Sally smiled.

"We?" Ginny looked over in surprise "Harry is here as well?"

"And Min... Hermione, and Uncle Mike and my mother"

"Who were you invited by?" Arthur asked, walking up behind Sally.

“Minister Fudge” Hermione said, walking up behind Sally.

“Or Cornelius, as he asked us to call him” Susan added, with a smirk. Ginny stared at her for a moment, then her smile brightened as she saw Harry and Sirius come over to them.

“Ginny - how’ve you been?” Harry asked.

“Fine, thank you” Ginny smiled at him, then glanced at Sally, then back at him “And you?”

“Well - we had our birthday yesterday - we nearly share the same birthday you know” He nodded at Sally “And we are out on the north hill, if you’d like to visit later” He realised the rest of his group was staring at him in surprise “But, if you will excuse us, we are supposed to meet the Minister, and I don’t think we should be late” He took Sally’s hand, and the five of them walked off up the stairs. Ginny watched them go, then turned to her family.

“So - do you believe me now?” She asked softly, and then smiled as the others nodded.

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“Welcome to The Quidditch World Cup”

Fudge’s voice echoed through the stadium as he announced the match. Harry stared out at the pitch, then realised he was staring at himself - lit up on a magical tv screen. The image switched to Sirius, then it shifted again to an image of him, Sirius and Fudge.

He turned and looked up at his uncle.

“You know he is using us, don’t you?”

“Yes Harry” Sirius nodded , then smiled “But would you rather be used by Fudge, who has done us some good and is on our side, or by the Headmaster” Harry smiled back, then turned his attention back to the match.

“First - the IRISH TEAM!”

Seven players flew on to the pitch in a blaze of fireworks, causing the three students to take a step back in surprise. Sally glanced at her friends’ faces, and burst out laughing.

"Yes - we do know what we look like" Hermione said without looking round.

"And here come the BULGARIANS!" Another seven players came onto the pitch, then the stadium came alive with thousands of people shouting a single word. Harry and Hermione looked around in shock, then they both turned to Sally.

"Who is Krum? And why is everyone shouting his name?"

"Viktor Krum - a seventh year student at Durmstrang School Of Magic, and quite probably the best seeker in the world" Sally glanced at Hermione, then smiled at Harry "So - Minnie - you think he's good then?" She stared at her friend "Min? You still with us?"

"Sorry?" Hermione tuned "You were saying... something?" She blushed, and they both laughed at the expression on her face.

"I was just asking if you were impressed by Krum or not?" Sally asked, still smirking.

"He is very good!" Hermione protested, then she sagged "Yeah - I know"

They all looked back at the pitch as the teams lined up.

"And now" Fudge's voice echoed through the stadium "We BEGIN!"

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The match had been over for an hour, and Harry and Hermione were still raving about what they had seen.

"You don't think that was amazing?" Harry asked as Sally stared at him.

"Yes - it was amazing" She smiled fondly at him.

"So why are you staring at me as if I am mental?"

"Because you haven't stopped talking for an hour, and between you and Min, I am surprised Krum's head hasn't burst" She leaned over and hugged him, then turned as Sirius and Susan came running into the tent "Mum?"

"All of you - come with us" Both adults had their wands out, and they were looking agitated.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked, but before they could get an answer, there was a loud scream from outside.

"Just get your wands, and come with us" Sirius repeated. The students glanced at each other, then did as they were told. Once they were all ready, Sirius pushed the tent flap open, then stepped out. Susan gestured to the students, and the three of them followed Sirius out, while Susan brought up the rear.

"What... Death Eaters?" Sally said in a terrified voice. Once they had left the tent, it had become obvious why Sirius and Susan were so uptight.

A group of figures, dressed in jet-black robes and bone-white masks, were marching through the tented area, firing off what seemed to be every curse under the sun. Then Harry caught sight of something else, and gasped.

A little way off from the main tented area, he could see a five year old girl being levitated in the air.

His face went hard, but before he could move, Susan grabbed his shoulder.

"Don't"

"But..."

"I know - you want to stop them. You want to hurt them and make them pay. But there are ten or twenty of them, and they were sent by whoever sent Lucius, and will kill you on sight"

"But..."

"The Aurors will deal with them" Sirius said "We need to get you to somewhere safe" He looked over at a small copse, and signalled to Susan.

"But if we are to fight Voldemort, shouldn't we start now?"

"No" Susan asked "You aren't ready and you have a choice - so you hide, and only draw your wands when you have to"

They arrived at the trees, and the three kids went inside, then watched as Susan and Sirius went back the way they had come.

"So they get to fight, and we don't?" Harry said in an annoyed tone.

"They are adults, and Sirius is an ex-Auror" Hermione slapped him on the arm, then turned to Sally "You okay?"

"I... will be" She smiled weakly "I am just not a fan of Death Eaters" She saw the looks of concern on her friends' faces "I will be fine once this is done"

"GINNY!" A loud scream of anguish caused them all to look round. Ron Weasley was crouched on the ground, next to the prone figure of his sister. Sally turned back to Harry, her tone teasing.

"Well - you said you wanted us to do something"

"Saving the wacky Slytherin wasn't what I had in mind, but what the hell" He glanced out again, and saw a lone figure in black coming up behind the Weasleys. Ron was still protecting his sister, and hadn't noticed "Sal?"

"If you can stop the black-coat over there, or at least distract him - Minnie and I can summon Ron and Ginny"

"Okay" He ducked down, then yelled "REDUCTO! EXPELLIRAMUS!! STUPEFY!! PETRIFICUS TOTALUS! INCARCEROUS!"

"ACCIO RON!"

"ACCIO GINNY!"

As the Death Eater dived to the floor to avoid Harry's volley of curses, the two red-heads suddenly flew towards the three students. Both girls braced themselves, but they were knocked off their feet as the Weasleys crashed in to them.

"STUP..." Harry started another curse, but stopped as he saw two Aurors do the same. They glanced in his direction, then took hold of the Death Eater, and vanished.

Harry looked around, but the area was empty. He gave a brief smiled, then turned back to his friends.



"What the hell did you do that for?" Ron yelled at Hermione as they both got to their feet.

"She was saving your life" Harry said quietly "There was a Death Eater behind you"

"Oh" Ron looked around, then back at them "How did you do magic?"

"With our wands" Sally said. She was running her hands through Ginny's hair. She stared at him, then her eyes lit up with understanding "You man the underage thing?"

"Don't tell me - your friend Cornelius gave you permission?"

"No" Hermione said, then she waved to the field "There is so much magic out there that they won't be able to tell who did what" She paused "But even if we would have been punished and expelled, we still would have done it"

"Thank you" Ginny said, sitting up. She turned to Sally "Will I live?"

"You have a huge bump on your head, and you might want to see a healer about that, but otherwise you should be fine"

"Better than dead" Ginny said with a half-laugh, then she looked up at Sally again "Really - thank you"

"Yeah - thanks Hermione" Ron added.

"It's okay" She replied "I am..." Suddenly the air was split by a chorus of terrified screams. They all turned to the source, then stared up at the sky with horrified faces.

"Oh my god!" Sally yelled, then turned as Susan came running towards them.

"We are leaving - now" Susan said "Ron, Ginny - you are coming with us. Sirius will tell your father"

"Okay" The five kids reached out as Susan held up a portkey.

"You all ready?" She asked, then, after they all said yes, she tapped it with her wand. The last thing they saw before they vanished was a huge skull, hanging in the night sky.

## Chapter 2

They reappeared outside Sally and Susan's house, and she ushered them all inside.

"Ron, Ginny - I will take you back to The Burrow. You three - go to Harry's and don't leave until I come and get you"

"Yes mum"

"Harry, Sally and Hermione watched as the two Weasleys flooded away, then they walked up to the fire, and went through to The White House.

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Half an hour later, Sirius and Susan came out of the floo to find Harry, Sally and Hermione waiting for them.

"What happened?" Sally asked.

"After you left, the Death Eaters - every single one of them - scattered and fled"

"The Death Eaters fled the Dark Mark?" Harry asked "Why?"

"I have no idea" Susan replied "But there was a flood of Aurors, and they sorted out the problems with the muggles, and picked up one or two of the Death Eaters"

"And also a group of healers came with them" Sirius added, then smiled at them "So Sue tells me you saved Ron and Ginny?"

"Pretty much" Hermione said with a smile "But don't think it's going to make much of a difference"

"If anything I think she will resent me even more" Sally added.

"And if you had to do it again?" Sirius asked.

"You really have to ask?"

"No" Both adults smiled, then Susan turned to Sally.

"How are you feeling?"

"I've been better, but after the initial shock, I was less scared than I thought I would be"

"Good" She hugged her daughter, then she and Sirius and turned to face all three of them "So - what are you going to do for the rest of the summer?" She looked at Sirius who nodded "We were talking on the way back, and have some ideas, but if you are going to lead the fight, we believe you should make the decisions" Sally looked at her friends, then turned back to her mother and Uncle.

"This is what we were thinking..."

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The next four weeks passed quickly as the students were trained by the rest of the members of The Order of V.

Sirius taught them astral transference, then gave them the basics of what he called "remote casting" - the method of performing magic while projected.

Remus wanted to teach them to be animagus, but - after talking to Sirius and Claire - switched to teaching the four students about politics and the way the wizarding world worked.

Susan and Claire taught the trio lessons in strategy and planning, supplemented by a few memories from Sally's father.

Arnold taught them all about the politics of the muggle world, and how it interacted with the wizarding world.

As the end of the holidays approached, they started to discuss their inevitable return to Hogwarts, and the equally inevitable trip to Diagon Alley.

"Luna, would you like to come with us?" Sally asked.

"No, but thank you" Luna smiled at them "Me and Dad will be going together - it's sort of a tradition" They looked at her "So - we will see you there?"

"I think the seven of us are all going together" Hermione said "Safety in numbers and all that"

"From Death Eaters? In Diagon Alley?"

"From Ginny" Harry replied.

"From Dumbledore" Hermione added.

"From..." Sally trailed off "No - that's pretty much it" She turned to the other two "We're only hiding from two people? That's got to be a record"

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Half an hour later, the seven of them walked out of Gringotts, and stared down the length of Diagon Alley. The only noticeable difference since The Cup was a few more Aurors, although none of them seemed to be taking their duties too seriously.

"So - do you want to split up? So we can get Minnie a birthday present?" Sirius asked. Harry nodded, but Hermione looked troubled "Min?"

"Haven't you noticed the looks?" She glanced around "Ever since we came in to the Alley, people have been... staring at us" The rest of them looked around, then turned back to her "See what I mean?"

"Why are they staring at us?" Sirius looked around "They can't still be in awe of me - it must have died down by now"

"It has" A voice came from behind them.

"Hey Luna" Sirius smiled.

"Good morning everyone" She waved at the group, then handed Sirius a copy of The Prophet.

"What's this?" Sirius skimmed the paper, then his eyes went back up to the top of the front page.

"Sirius?" Susan asked after a few moments. He looked up, and then turned the paper round.

**HARRY POTTER - HEIR TO DARK MAGIC?**

"It seems Miss Skeeter thinks that Remus and I are not suitable mentors for The Boy Who Lived" He frowned "The reasons for Remus are obvious, if misguided, but she doesn't like me either"

"Because"

"The Black Family is universally dark, bordering on evil" He replied "Two of my three cousins are Death Eaters, my parents were pure-blood racists of the highest Order, my brother was a Death Eater, and quite honestly I am just about the only member of my whole misbegotten family who is not in some way evil" He smiled at the looks on their faces "So I have family problems"

"And this... reporter thinks that you and Remus are going to corrupt Harry because you are both supposedly dark?" Claire asked.

"Seems so" Sirius looked around, and realised nearly everyone in the Alley was staring at them "Maybe we should go somewhere else?"

"Maybe we should"

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Five minutes later, they were in a private room in The Leaky Cauldron.

"Do you think this is Dumbledore's doing?" Arnold asked.

"As much as I hate to admit it, probably not" Sirius replied "He is trying to get back in our good books, and this..." He waved at the paper "...isn't the way to do it" Sirius smirked "And even he must realise that"

"So - who?" Sally asked.

"I have no idea" Sirius hung his head in his hands "It's not Dumledore, and it's not Voldemort" They stared at him "He wouldn't gain anything by it"

"So who does that leave?" There was a minute or two of silence, then Claire turned to Sirius and Susan.

"What do they mean by dark magic?" She asked "Is it like black magic?"

"Sort of" Hermione replied "Dark magic is the general term for any spells that harm people, and that use... evil means" She shrugged helplessly "It's a vague area, but most wizards know it when they see it"

"And the Black Family used dark magic a lot?" Claire asked Sirius.

"Pretty much" Sirius frowned "My family is not that nice" He smiled "Which is part of the reason I left them and joined the Potters"

"Is there a difference between dark and evil?" Arnold asked.

"Depends on who you ask" Harry smirked.

"Sorry?"

"Most of the wizards who call themselves light wizards think there isn't any difference" Hermione replied "But personally, I think that it is a matter of perspective" She paused "You can kill someone with a levitation charm, but we are taught that as first years"

"So there are no dark spells?" Sally asked curiously.

"I would say it depends on your intentions" Hermione replied, and Sirius nodded, but Susan frowned "Aunt Sue?"

"The Unforgivables?" Susan looked around the group "Would you say they aren't dark?"

"Maybe" Hermione replied "But if you cast a killing curse to save someone's life, does that mean you did a bad thing?" She saw Susan look at her thoughtfully "The muggle world has had the idea of self-defence for a long time, and yet the wizarding world thinks you can kill and maim as long as you do it painfully"

"So you don't think they should be unforgivable?" Sirius asked.

"I don't know" Hermione shrugged "I just think that the wizarding world has a lot more problems than one dark lord"

"And speaking of the wizarding world" Sirius looked at his watch "We really should get back - we have school supplies to buy"

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"Harry!" Ginny's voice called out across the Alley, and the group came to a halt.

"Is this one of those problems the wizarding world has?" Sally asked with a smile.

"Oh yes" Harry took her hand, then they both turned to face the approaching family of red-heads.

"Hello Ginny, Ron" Sirius nodded, then turned to their parents "Arthur, Molly"

"Mr Black" The two adults nodded back, then turned to their kids "Ron, Ginny - we have shopping to do - come along" Mrs Weasley tugged on their arms, and a moment later they were walking off down the Alley. Harry and Sally stared at each other for a moment, then smiled.

"So - what's next?"

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The next day, Sirius took the three students to Platform 9 3/4, and watched as they boarded the train.

"Keep in touch" He said "And try to keep out of trouble, if at all possible"

"We will" Sally replied "And you'll let us know if you find out about the article"

"Of course" Sirius stepped back as he heard the whistle blow, and waved as the train started to pull out of the station.

The kids waved until he was out of sight, then sat back down.

"Do you think there is any chance that the wacky Slytherin and her older brother will listen to their mother and leave us alone?" Harry asked.

"No"

"No"

"Didn't think so"

"Hello" They all turned as Luna came in to the compartment "Did you all have a nice summer?" Harry opened his mouth to ask her what she was on about when he realised her hands were moving. He stared for a moment, then nodded.

"We had a lovely summer, thank you Luna" He beamed "You?"

"Dad and I went out on a holiday to Sweden to hunt snorkacks"

"Did you..." Sally was interrupted as the door slid open again "...find any?"

"No" Luna said mournfully "Daddy thinks they have all moved to Fredonia" She sat down, then all four of them looked up at the newcomers "Hello Weasleys"

"Luna" Ron turned to the others "Hey"

"Ron" Harry nodded "I'm surprised you want to be seen with such dark wizards as us"

"We just wanted you to know that we don't believe what Skeeter wrote" Ginny said "I am sure Sirius and Remus are both good men, and that you are not going dark"

"Thank you" He smiled "So how was your summer? I mean apart from The Cup"

"It was very nice, thank you" Ginny said, sitting down next to Luna, while Ron sat next to Hermione "Ron's been practicing all summer - he is planning on trying out for keeper now that Oliver has left"

"Really?" Hermione smiled "Good luck"

"Thanks" Ron smiled, then turned to Sally "What about you, Sally?" Georgia left with Oliver, so there's an opening for a seeker" Sally stared at him for a moment, then shrugged.

"I'll see who tries out" She smiled "What courses did you chose for the year?"

"Care of Magical Creatures, Muggle Studies and Arithmancy" She smiled at Harry "I think they are the best choices, don't you?"



"Depends on what you want to do with your life" Harry replied "And, to be honest, muggle studies is a total waste of time unless you are a pure-blood who just wants to feel superior about themselves" He saw Sally and Hermione smile, while Ginny went slightly red "Although I am sure you will get more out of it than Sally and I did"

"If you are willing to help me study, I am sure I can" Ginny smiled at him, but he shook his head.

"I am afraid we are going to be busy for a lot of the time this year" He looked across at Sally "We are all taking an extra course in estate management"

"But you are muggle-born" Ron turned to Hermione "Why would you need to learn estate management?"

"This is Min we are talking about" Sally replied with a smile "Can you imagine her giving up a chance to learn about something?" Hermione smiled at her, then turned back to Ron.

"And what if I were to marry an heir to a large house? Wouldn't I need to know something about it then?"

"A muggle-born can't marry their heir of a house" Luna said "The Wizengamot passed laws against it a few years back" They all turned to stare at her "They don't think that our world should be corrupted by diluting the blood lines, nor that our older families should be brought under muggle influences"

"Really?" Harry asked in surprise.

"Yeah" Sally replied "It was one of the more controversial laws passed, and Fudge tried to oppose it, but there is a powerful pure-blood presence in the government, and they really want to keep the status quo" She leaned over and hugged him "But there isn't much we can do about it now, so what do you say to a game of snap?"

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Several hours later, as the train pulled in to Hogsmeade, Hermione suddenly looked round in surprise.

"Why didn't Malfoy come to annoy us?"

"Didn't you hear?" Ron turned to stare at her.

"Hear what?"

"After Lucius vanished at the start of the holiday, Draco and Narcissa apparently went on the run"

"Why?"

"They think he was killed by You-Know-Who for something, and they will be next on the list" Ron smiled "He won't be in school this year"

"Wow" Hermione leaned back in her seat "So no one has seen them since the start of the holidays?"

"There have been the odd rumours" Ginny said seriously "But they seem to have vanished off the face of the earth" She looked at Harry, Sally and Hermione "What do you know about this?"

"Nothing" Sally said "We were just thinking about what the school will be like without Malfoy" She smiled "Could be our best year yet!"

### Chapter 3

Harry, Luna, Sally and Hermione claimed a carriage for themselves and, as they rode up to the castle, discussed the possible staffing replacements.

"Do you think Snape will be back?" Sally asked.

"Not unless Dumbledore wants to see him arrested" Harry muttered. Hermione glared at him, then shook her head.

"Dumbledore knows if Snape comes back, we are going to demand he is questioned about Lucius, and that from what Minister Fudge heard that night, we might well get our way"

"Do you think they are still in touch?" Sally looked at the others "He always said he trusted Snape, and that our former potions professor was a good man"

"So he won't believe that Snape is a traitor?"

"I guess not" Sally shrugged "So - who do you think will replace him?"

"I don't know" Hermione shook her head "There are a few qualified potions masters, but I can't imagine any of them being willing to teach"

"And do any of you know about the new DaDa teacher?" Luna asked.

"From what I learned from my Dad" Sally said "Mad-Eye Moody was the head of the Auror Corps, but retired after the end of the last war" She paused, then added "And according to my mum, he is a little bit... mental"

"Mental?"

"Well - it's nothing definite, but he is apparently very paranoid and jumpy"

"Just the type of person you want to have in a school full of kids" Hermione smirked "But, if he is really that paranoid, then hopefully he won't be possessed"

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"Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts" Dumbledore's voice boomed out across the great hall "Welcome back to all our returning students, and hello to our new first years. While every year at Hogwarts is special, this year will be a unique experience for every student. But, before I tell you what this year holds, we should proceed with the sorting. Professor McGonagall - if you would?"

They watched as the Deputy Head carried The Sorting Hat to the front of the hall, then stood to one side.

Houses	Four	have	split	the	school,
One	per	student,	that	is	the
So	every	year	the	first	year
To	see	which	of	the	many
will	separate	them	from	their	friends,
and	start	a	fight	that	never
The	brave	will	fight	the	cunning
The	loyal	will	always	be	a
The	rest	exploit	the	house	with

And because of this, the hate remains.

But	by	the	naming	of	The	Four,
This	schism	has	to	be	no	more.
The	houses	must	unite	at	last,	
For	the	prophesied	storm	is	coming	fast.
Three	will	fight,	and	when	one	wins
The	final	fall	of	night		begins.
And	those	the	Founders'	Faith	that	bare,
Will	stand	to	face	the	one	true
As	fear	and	terror	stalk	the	land

The Order's Hour is now at hand.

McGonagall stared at The Hat for a moment, then held up her list of students.

"Louise Allerton"

As a short blonde girl came forward, Harry turned to his friends.

"So... that whole 'best year yet' thing seems to be out the window" He smirked.

"Three will fight" Sally asked "She doesn't mean us, does she?"

"Don't think so" Hermione replied "But, whatever she is talking about, I think that Vader is coming back this year" She looked at the other two "So - who wants to tell Sirius?"

"I can" Harry glanced up, and - seeing the sorting was still going on - he turned back "What do you think Dumbledore will make of 'The Order's Hour'?"

"Hopefully he will think Vanessa is talking about his Order, and not ours" Sally replied "That should keep him busy for a while. He might even bring it back up to speed"

"Malachi Zebron"

They turned to see a young, dark-haired boy sit down on the stool, and a moment later get sorted in to Hufflepuff.

"Do you think the houses will unite?" Hermione asked, then, realising that a number of Hufflepuffs were glaring at her, as were some of the Gryffindors, she shook her head "Guess not" She glanced at the Ravenclaw table, and frowned as she saw Luna sat on her own "Guys - can we do something?" They followed her gaze, then both nodded.

"Thank you Professor McGonagall" Dumbledore stood up again "And congratulations to our newest students. So now - let the feast begin!"

-----

"That must be our new potions teacher" Sally gestured to a large man sat at the far end of the staff table "But I can't see Moody anywhere"

"Maybe he's running late" Harry looked along the staff table "Who's that?"

"Bartemius Crouch" Hermione said, with a note of distaste in her voice.

"Who?" Harry was still staring up at the staff table.

"Runs the Department of International Magical Co-Operation, which isn't as grand as it sounds. They are supposed to liaise with other magical governments, but most of that is done by the ICW, so his job ends up being mostly ceremonial"

"And?" Sally turned to her "There is something else"

"He was the Head of the DMLE during the first war" She stared up at the table, then turned back to her friends "He used his position, and the fear of Voldemort, to turn the hunt for Death Eaters in to a Witch-Hunt, if you will excuse the phrase" Her face grew serious "He authorized the use of all three unforgivables, he sent several Death Eaters to Azkaban without trial, and just left them to rot" She shuddered "There are people who say he became as bad as those he was hunting, and that he punished just as many innocent people as guilty ones"

"So - what's he doing here?"

"Something to do with the special year Dumbledore has planned?" Sally asked.

"Well - I hope you all enjoyed the feast" Dumbledore stood up "Now, before Mr Crouch makes his announcement, I have a few announcements of my own"

"Lets see what he says about Snape" Harry whispered.

"Professor Snape has decided to extend his leave until further notice, so I am happy to introduce Professor Slughorn" The large man nodded, and there was a brief round of applause "And, unfortunately, our new Defence teacher appears to be running a little late..." There was a sudden interruption as the doors to the Great Hall crashed open.

Everyone turned as a figure appeared, and started stalking up the centre aisle. As he reached the front, and shook hands with Dumbledore, Sally turned back to her friends.

"That's him"

"Moody?"

"Yeah"

"Well - it seems our Defence teacher has arrived" Dumbledore smiled "So, may I present retired Auror Alastor Moody" There was a small smattering of applause, and Moody glared around the hall, his luminous blue-eye revolving wildly, until it came to rest on Harry. Harry stared back, then turned away, and sat down. Dumbledore watched the interaction, then turned back to the students.

"And finally, I have to announce there will be no Quidditch Cup this year" He stopped again as the hall erupted with shouts of disbelief. The Weasley twins and Ron were the most vocal, but there was a lot of noise coming from the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables as well. But, he noticed, Sally was smiling to herself.

"SILENCE!" He stared around as the hall fell silent "As I was saying, there will be no Quidditch Cup this year, as Hogwarts is playing host to a very special event. To tell you all about it, I present Mr Bartemius Crouch"

The hall remained silent as Crouch came to the podium.

"Thank you, Headmaster" He turned to face the students "I am very pleased and proud to announce that this year Hogwarts will play host to The Tri-Wizard Tournament" There were a lot of exclamations from around the hall. Crouch waited for them to quieten, then continued "For those amongst you who don't know, The Tri-Wizard Tournament is a contest that draws together three top magic schools in, to take part in three tasks of courage and daring and skill" He nodded to the back of the hall "In a few weeks time, representatives and students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang Schools will be arriving, and then, a few weeks after that, a champion from each school will be selected to compete" He gazed around the hall again, then continued.

"Due to the dangerous nature of the tasks, the Heads of Schools in conjunction with the three governments have decided that only those over the age of seventeen may..." The rest of his sentence was drowned out by a chorus of boos and yells of complaint from around the hall. When it refused to die down, Dumbledore stepped forward.

"QUIET!!!" The hall fell silent at once.

"Thank you Albus" He paused "I must warn you that, once you agree to participate, and if you are chosen, you must see it through to the end. So I caution you all to think through any decision you make" He stepped back, and the Headmaster stepped forward.

"Thank you, Mr Crouch" He turned back "The tasks will take place through the year, and of course, anyone who isn't taking part is permitted to come as a spectator" He smiled "And that is all. The prefects will take you to your common rooms, and you will get your timetables in the morning"

-----

"So - who do you think will enter?" Harry asked as they walked up to the common room.

"Cedric Diggory"

"Lucy Doyle"

"Marcus Flint, if he were still here" Sally looked up the corridor to where Ginny was talking to the twins "Do you think they'll manage it?"

"Probably not" Hermione replied "But whatever they are going to do is going to be fun to watch"

"Mr Potter" A voice called from behind them. They stopped as Professor McGonagall caught up with them "Mr Potter - the Headmaster would like to speak with you in his office"

"Okay" Harry nodded, then turned to the two girls "I will catch up with you in a moment?"

"Yes dear" Sally leaned over, and kissed him firmly, then she and Hermione turned and walked up the corridor. Harry watched them go, then turned to the deputy Headmistress.

"I am at your disposal"

-----

"PERKS!" Ron's voice ran out across the Gryffindor common room as Sally and Hermione made their way in.



"Yes Ronald?" Sally walked over to him "How may I annoy you today?"

"I bet you're unhappy about the tournament, aren't you?" He sneered.

"Why would I be unhappy?" She looked surprised "I mean it's not like any of us will be taking part"

"But you won't get your chance to feel superior by screwing over the Quidditch Team" Sally stared at him, then shrugged.

"But, on the other hand, I do get the chance to laugh at your brothers' pathetic attempts to enter the tournament" She smirked at the expression on Ron's face, then turned to Hermione "I am going to unpack. Can you come get me when Harry comes back?"

-----

"Ah - Harry, thank you for coming"

"Professor Dumbledore - I have been meaning to ask you a question for a while"

"Yes?"

"Why do you refer to me as Harry, when all the other staff members refer to me as Mr Potter?" Dumbledore looked at him.

"I do apologise - I wasn't aware I was doing it. If you like, I can call you Mr Potter"

"No, sir, that's okay. I was just curious" Harry looked around "So - you wanted to talk to me?"

"Yes" He lifted up a copy of The Daily Prophet "I was wondering if you could shed some light on this" Harry skimmed through the front page, then shrugged.

"No"

"So it's not true?"

"You really believe my Uncle is teaching me Dark Magic, sir?" Harry stared at him "And that, after all I have seen Dark Magic do to me and mine that I would let him?"

"The Black Family is notorious for Dark and black magic, Harry. Even you must know about their reputation, and about Sirius' cousins Narcissa and Bellatrix"

"Yes - Uncle Mike was very open about his family history" Harry smiled "But he also told me about his membership in The Order, and the fact my parents trusted him more than anyone else" He paused "Even you sir"

"It is true that Sirius rebelled against his family" Dumbledore nodded "But now that he has a family of his own to look after, he might be willing to take... actions that he would not otherwise consider"

"If you are asking me if my Uncle is teaching me Dark Magic, or teaching it to me or his nieces, the answer is no. And if The Prophet moves from talking about my godfather's family to suggesting, however obliquely, that he is teaching me, then we will take action against them" He stared at Dumbledore "Is that all, sir?"

"Almost. I wanted to congratulate you and your friends on your actions during The World Cup. Saving two people's lives is very impressive"

"Thank you, sir. I will tell Sally and Hermione"

"How did you get around the underage magic restrictions?"

"Hermione described it as magical saturation - with the number of spells being hurled around, no one was going to detect ours" He smiled "But, as Hermione also pointed out, we would have done it, even if it meant expulsion from Hogwarts"

"Which is a very creditable attitude"

"Again - thank you" He smiled "Is there anything else, sir?"

"No, Harry - I think that will be all for now" Dumbledore stood up, but Harry remained seated "Harry?"

"Aren't you going to demand that I must go live with my Aunt?"

"I didn't think you would listen to such an appeal" He looked suddenly hopeful "Would you?"

"No, but it never seemed to stop you before, sir"

"I suppose not"

"Have you heard from Snape, sir?" Harry watched for Dumbledore's reaction, and was a little surprised when there wasn't one.

"No, I haven't heard from Professor Snape" He sighed "As much as it vexes me to admit it, I believe that he has betrayed me, and joined his former master" He looked at Harry "Nothing to say?"

"I loathed him, he loathed me, he loathed my friends because they were my friends, and he was possibly the single most hated teacher in the school" Harry replied "It is surprising how unsurprised we were that he turned out to be a Death Eater"

"Have you shared this with anyone else?"

"No sir - only those who knew already" Harry looked at him curiously "Why?"

"I was just curious" The Headmaster smiled "Well - if you have no further questions, I believe you should return to Gryffindor Tower" Harry nodded, and stood up.

-----

"Good evening, Harry" Sirius looked up as Harry walked in to the room "How was your first day at school?"

"Interesting" He filled Sirius in on the new teachers, the tournament and his talk with Dumbledore.

"Slughorn taught us when we were at school. He isn't Dark, exactly, but I wouldn't trust him"

"Why?"

"He tends to make friends with students he thinks will be influential" Sirius started pacing "He likes the idea that he has friends in high places, and that he can have some influence over them" He smirked

"And, before you ask, The Boy Who Lived is someone he would like to have influence over"

"But he isn't a Death Eater?"

"No - it's not in him to make a stand one way or the other" Sirius paused "But if he had to chose one way or the other, he would side against Voldemort"

"What about Moody?"

"He would die before siding with Voldemort" Sirius said with absolute conviction.

"So we can trust him?"

"No" Sirius shook his head "He is devoted to Dumbledore, and is - or was - deputy leader of The Order when it was active" He sighed "I can't see that changing, and if you tell him about us, Dumbledore will know soon after"

"Okay - I will warn the others" He hugged his Uncle, then vanished.

-----

Luna looked around the dorm, and sighed. The term had started in the usual way - her housemates were ignoring her, teasing her and stealing her stuff. She had, in her first year, considered Professor Flitwick, but after hearing a prefect telling another first year that 'No one likes snitches', she had learned to put up with it.

She was about to change for bed when she saw a movement in the corner of the room. She turned, then smiled.

"Hey Min"

## Chapter 4

"I never thought a potions lesson could be like that" The three students walked out of the dungeons after their first lesson with Professor Slughorn.

"I know - with the teaching, and the explanations and the politeness" Sally smiled "I had to check we were in the correct classroom"

"So - Professor Slughorn is a hit?" Hermione asked.

"In comparison to Snape?" Harry smirked "Do you really need to ask?"

They walked up to the Great Hall and sat down for lunch.

"What do you think Professor Moody is going to teach us?" Sally asked, as the other students came in.

"Well - given our history, I would say he is going to teach us how to stop him killing us later in the year" Hermione smiled "But this year is supposed to be about curses, hexes and counters"

"Cool" Harry smiled "So we get to curse people for school?" He rubbed his hands together "Pity Malfoy left really"

"Pity we can get The Wacky Slytherin bumped up a year" Sally added, causing both the others to smirk. She looked up to see Luna walk in to the hall "Should I?"

"Do you think Dumbledore and the Prefects will let her?" Hermione asked, glancing up the hall.

"I guess we'll find out" Harry waved to the blonde Ravenclaw, and she walked over to them "We were wondering if you would like to join us?" The smile on Luna's face answered his question. She sat down next to Hermione, then glanced up to the staff table.

"Do you think anyone will mind?" She asked quietly.

"Probably" Hermione replied "But we'll cross that bridge when we come to it" She handed Luna a bowl of bread rolls "How was your DaDa lesson?"

"Interesting" Luna replied "Professor Moody seems to be using Remus' lesson plan - he started with boggarts" She frowned slightly "I had to stay near the back"

"Why?" Hermione asked, concern in her voice "What form does your boggart take?"

"Before I started here, I would have said my father dying was the thing I feared the most" Luna shivered "But after I was attacked, and petrified..."

"A basilisk?" Sally asked in surprise, and Luna nodded.

"And after what we said about Hermione's boggart, you were scared it would kill the class?"

"I don't know, but Professor Moody agreed we shouldn't take the chance" There was a moment of silence, then she smiled "But enough of that! What was Professor Slughorn like?"

-----

Dumbledore walked into the Great Hall, and almost at once noticed the blonde Ravenclaw sat at the wrong table. He stared for a moment, then continued on his way to the staff table.

As he sat down, McGonagall turned to him.

"So - you saw?"

"Yes, Minerva, I saw"

"Are you going to say anything?"

"Not for the moment, no"

"May I ask why?" Dumbledore gazed at her for a moment, considering his options. She had been loyal so far, ready to help Harry prepare for his future, but his plans for the coming year were more ambitious, and he wasn't sure she would entirely approve.

"Mr Potter seems to enjoy baiting the senior staff, and no doubt this is just another attempt to get a rise out of us" He stared at the group of four students "So we are not going to react to it" His deputy stared at him for a moment, then nodded.

"Very well. Shall I inform the prefects and Heads Of Houses?"

"If you could, thank you" He looked at the group, and wondered when they had had time to become so friendly.

-----

"Good afternoon. My name is Professor Moody, former Master Auror and your new Defence teacher" He stared around the classroom, then fixed both his eyes on a pair at the back "Finnegan - what's so interesting?"

"Nothing sir!" Seamus looked up from the magazine he had been reading.

"Then put that nothing away, or I'll have it from you" He looked round the rest of the class, then continued "Dumbledore asked me to come here to teach you how to defend yourselves" He looked around the class again "You will learn a number of defensive spells, and a few offensive ones, but you are only to use them if you must - no playing with them between classes. Is that clear?"

"Yes sir!" The class replied.

"Very good" He turned and wrote the word "UNFORGIVABLE" on the board "Who can tell me the unforgivable curses?" He looked around - only four students had their hands up "Perks?"

"The Imperious Curse, sir"

"Good. Potter?"

"The Cruciatus Curse, sir"

"Yes. Granger?"

"The Killing Curse"

"Very good" He wrote the names on the board "Longbottom - why are they called unforgivable?"

"Because they are unforgivable" The boy said, his voice catching "There is no excuse for using them"

"Yes!" Moody span back to face the class "The use of any one of those curses will get you a life sentence in Azkaban" He walked over to a tank in the corner, and pulled out a spider "The Ministry doesn't think you should know about these, but after the summer, Dumbledore thought you should have an idea of what's out there" He put the spider on the desk, and pulled out his wand.

"IMPERIO!"

The spider froze for a moment, then leaped through the air, guided by the movement of Moody's wand. He made it dance through the air, to the amusement of the watching children.

For the next thirty seconds, he jumped it from desk to desk, student to student, until most of the class was laughing, then he lifted the spider in the air.

"Fun, isn't it?" He asked "Now - should I make her jump out of the window?" The spider crashed into a window pane "Drown herself?" He flung the wand back and the spider back to hover above Pavarti "Or make her kill?" He stared around the now silent class, noticing that Granger was now smiling to herself "The Imperious Curse gives you complete control over anyone. You can fight it, but it requires constant vigilance" He looked over at Hermione, who was still smiling "Granger - The Cruciatus curse?"

"The torture curse, sir"

"Yes" Moody turned back to the spider "Engorgio!" The spider grew to twice its size, then Moody took a breath, then yelled "CRUCIO!"

The spider started to convulse and writhe under Moody's wand, and Hermione could almost hear it screaming.

"STOP IT!" Sally yelled. She stood up and walked over to Neville, who was staring at the spider, an expression of agony on his face. Moody looked around, then pulled his wand up.

"Sorry" He looked down at Neville, then turned to Harry "And Mr Potter - I take it you know about the last of the curses?"

"Yes sir"



"I thought so" Moody turned, and, pointing his wand at the spider, yelled "AVADA KEDAVRA!!" There was a flash of green light, and as it faded, the spider lay dead. The class was silent as he turned to face them.

"It can't be shielded or deflected, and only one person has ever survived" He stared at Harry, then looked up "Any questions?" There was a moment's pause, then Hermione raised her hand "Miss Granger?"

"You said the punishment for using those curses was a life sentence in Azkaban?"

"Yes"

"And that the curses are considered unforgivable?"

"That's true"

"But Mr Crouch gave you, and the other Aurors, permission to use the unforgivable curses in the last war, so wouldn't it be more accurate to say they are only unforgivable when they are used by people The Ministry doesn't like?" Moody stared down at her.

"Do you believe that people should be allowed to use them willy-nilly?"

"No" She shook her head "But I don't think they should be automatically punishable - that circumstances should be taken in to account"

"So you think they are acceptable in certain circumstances?" He looked over as another hand went up "Miss Perks?"

"If someone is kissed by a dementor, isn't it a kindness to end their suffering? In a quick, painless way?"

"And isn't it true that healers used to be able to use the Cruciatus curse, or the rhesus curse as it was known, to revive people?" Hermione added. She saw the expression on Moody's face "And if Aurors can use them to torture suspected Death Eaters, and to force them to attack other Death Eaters, then why shouldn't it be legal for everyone else when they are doing good?"

-----

"Harry?" The three students turned as Neville called to them.

"Yes"

"Do you agree with them?" Neville gestured to the girls "That unforgivables aren't evil?"

"LONGBOTTOM!!" Moody's voice rang out through the corridor. All four students turned "Come with me"

"Yes sir" Neville cast a final frown at Sally and Hermione, then walked off towards the DaDa teacher. Harry watched him go, then turned back to the two girls.

"So - I guess we aren't going to be making friends with Neville this year then"

-----

Later that afternoon, they caught up with Luna, and they all walked down to Myrtle's bathroom.

"Myrtle?" Harry called out, and a moment later the ghostly girl faded into view "Wow"

"Hello Harry" She beamed "Hello ladies"

"So - you have been practicing as well?" Sally smiled "That was very impressive"

"Thank you" Myrtle bowed "It's ever so useful - I have been floating all round the castle, listening to conversations, watching people coming and going..." She turned to Hermione "You caused quite a stir today, young lady"

"Me? What did I do?"

"Everyone is talking about your argument with Moody" Myrtle giggled "And that you like using Unforgivable Curses in your spare time" She glanced across at Harry "They blame Uncle Mike for this, by the way"

"Figures" Sally laughed "You don't believe them, do you?"

"No" Myrtle shook her head "But how do you use the Cruciatus curse to heal? I thought it needed hate to cast it?"

"It needs a base emotion" Hermione replied, then stopped when Luna giggled.

"Your voice changes" The young girl said "When you are explaining something, your voice changes - it becomes more... formal"

"Really?" Hermione shrugged "Force of habit I guess" She paused "But as I was saying, the spells require a base emotion to power them. So if you want to hurt someone, you have to really want to hurt them - you can't just want to punish them"

"Like the difference between hate and righteous anger?" Sally asked.

"Exactly" Hermione nodded "But if you want to use them in a... good way, then you need a strong positive emotion"

"So to use the killing curse to put someone out of their misery, you need to really believe you are helping them?" Harry asked.

"Yes" Hermione sighed "But it's all academic anyway - The Ministry badly over-reacted to the Death Eaters and the events of the first war, and now anyone who uses them, even with the best of intentions, is done for" She sighed. For a moment, no one spoke, then Myrtle snapped her fingers, which was a little unsettling as they made no sound.

"Did you come in here for a reason, or just to say hi?" She asked.

"We wanted to show you something" Sally said, then turned to Harry. He closed his eyes, then a copy of him appeared on the other side of the room, and a moment later the original version of him vanished.

"Wow" Myrtle floated over to him "That's really good"

"Not that good" He replied with a frown "That's about as far as we can go"

"But - it's better than nothing" Myrtle beamed, then glanced at Luna "Are you learning this as well?"

"No, not yet" Luna smiled "They are teaching me the basics, but they say I need to mature a little before I move on to the advanced stuff"

"It makes sense" Myrtle says.

"Plus they think I am out of my mind already, and are worried about it being permanent" The four other people in the room stared at her in surprise "Did you all get your sense of humour removed over the summer?"

"So - am I going to be seeing a lot of you four over this year?"

"Unless we are caught and expelled"

"Excellent"

-----

"Alastor - would you care to comment on the rumours I have been hearing around school?" Dumbledore asked as Moody sat down opposite him.

"Which rumours are those, Albus?"

"That Miss Granger and Miss Perks voiced the belief that the unforgivable curses are perfectly acceptable?"

"Oh - those rumours" Moody paused "The two young ladies said that, in various circumstances, that people should be allowed to use the unforgivables without punishment"

"Such as?"

"Mercy killings, re-waking coma victims" Moody smiled "They also asked why I wasn't in jail after the last war" Dumbledore considered this for a moment.

"And Mr Potter? What was his view on this?"

"He didn't say one way or the other" Moody replied "But, from the look on his face, I would say he agreed with them"

"Really?" Dumbledore gave a brief smile "What's your opinion? Of there view I mean?"

"They are young" Moody sighed "They haven't seen the curses being used in anger, so they have no idea how bad they can really be"

"But?"

"I agree with them to a certain degree. If Voldemort is coming back, he isn't going to be stopped by a stunning spell, and if it's a choice between me casting a killing curse, and watching a Death Eater torture a muggle into insanity, I know what I would pick" Dumbledore was silent for a few moments, then he nodded.

"Very well. I would, of course, ask you not to share that view with any of your classes. The children don't need to be getting mixed messages about Dark Magic"

"Of course" Moody stood up "Will that be all?"

"Yes, thank you" Moody turned to leave "One more thing"

"Yes, Albus?"

"Could you keep an eye on those three, and let me know if anything else happens I should be made aware of?"

"Of course"

-----

After Moody left, Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, and smiled. This year was going better than he had ever hoped it could, and if the Granger girl continued to voice her opinions in such an open and obvious manner, then all the better.

He stood up and walked over to his private study, and checked on the potion he had been working on since the holidays. It was progressing nicely, and - if everything went well, it would be ready for the other schools' arrival.

He returned to his office and sat down.

"Yes" He thought "This year is going very well"

## Chapter 5

A few weeks later, the students were gathered outside the school, waiting for the delegations from the visiting schools to arrive.

"How long are we going to have to stand around out here?" Ron's voice came across the group. Hermione turned across to stare at him, then looked up.

"Not that long, Ronald" She yelled back, and pointed up in to the sky. Two coaches, drawn by a group of winged horses, were flying over the castle.

As the assembled students watched, the coaches flew down to the far end of the lake, then gently turned, and flew back towards the school. A moment later they came in to land, and drew up in front of the students.

Dumbledore strode forward, and waited as the door to the first carriage opened.

"Oh my" Luna said softly. Hermione turned to her with a questioning look.

"What?"

"I never thought I would meet another one after Hagrid" She replied in a whisper.

"Another what?"

"Half-giant" Hermione stared at her in surprise "You didn't know?"

"No" She shook her head "It never really occurred to me"

"Really?" Luna shrugged "I thought it was fairly obvious" They were interrupted as the woman walked forward, and took Dumbledore's hand.

"Madam Maxine" Dumbledore smiled "Welcome to Hogwarts - to you and your students"

"Thank you, Albus - it is a pleasure to be here once again" She spoke with a slight French accent, then turned back to the carriages "And may I present my students"

A moment later, the doors to the second, slightly larger, carriage opened, and a number of girls streamed out of the carriages. They walked forward in two columns, and lined up behind their headmistress.

Sally looked around, then gave a small laugh at the expressions on most of the male population of the school. She turned to talk to Harry, and her smile brightened as she saw he was not one of those currently taking part in what she would politely call "DroolFest 3000". He noticed her.

"Sal?"

"You are very sweet, you know that?"

"I do know that" He replied with a smile, then kissed her cheek.

"Don't you want to know why?"

"I just assumed it was the usual reason"

"Oh" She giggled, then turned back to watch the Beauxbaton students walk, still in perfect formation, in to the school.

"Well - that should make school more entertaining for the year" Luna said with a smile "I just hope that Filch can sort out the anti-drool spells through the castle" The others laughed, then turned when there was a large disturbance from the lake.

"What is that?" Harry asked in surprise.

"I think it is the students from Durmstrang" Hermione replied, still staring at the lake. There was a large swell of water coming towards the shore, and then a black shape rose out of the surface.

"It's a ship?" Sally asked in surprise "A ship?"

"Apparently so" Luna smiled as what appeared to be a large pirate ship rose to the surface, water cascading off every surface.

"How..." Hermione was staring at it, disbelief etched on her face "Is the cabin water-tight? Or the whole ship?"

"Minnie" Harry took her hands in his face and turned it towards him "You do remember what magic is?"

"Oh yeah" She smiled a little sheepishly "Ooops"

The ship glided across the lake, and then came to a halt by a dock.

"That wasn't there this morning, was it?"

"Magic"

And then a door on the side opened, and a tall man with what Sally considered was a somewhat remarkable beard came out, and walked up to the Headmaster.

"Igor - it is nice to see you again. Welcome to Hogwarts School"

"Thank you, Headmaster Dumbledore" He bowed, then turned back to the boat "My students" He announced, and a group of young men walked out of the boat in three columns. They walked up to their headmaster, then past him and in to the school.

As they went past Harry's group, Hermione gave a small gasp. Luna turned to her.

"Min?"

"It's nothing" Hermione followed the group with her eyes, then turned back "Sorry - I thought I saw someone"

"Who?"

"Viktor Krum"

xoxox

"Why does it surprise you?"

The four students were walking back through the school, heading for the great hall, for the welcoming ceremony. Hermione turned to Sally.



"Pardon?"

"He is a world famous seeker, and this contest will make him a legend just for competing in it, whether he wins it or not" Sally smiled at her "So why does it surprise you that he is willing to take part in it?"

"I don't know" Hermione continued walking, looking pensive "I just thought that, since he is a seeker and has a good future ahead of him, he wouldn't risk his life on... this" She waved her hands around "Surely he has better things to do with his life"

"You do not think it is a great honour to take part?" A voice came from behind them. All four students stopped, and turned to see a few students of Durmstrang stood behind them, including the one they had been discussing a moment earlier.

"Eeeep" Hermione said, then went red.

"Well said" Harry smiled, then turned to the group in front of him "Hello, my name is Harry Potter"

"Hello" Viktor smiled "I am Viktor Krum, and these are my friends Josef, Anton and Iyla"

"Greetings" Harry gave a slight bow "May I introduce Luna Lovegood, my girlfriend Sally-Ann Perks and my good and dear friend Miss Hermione Granger" Viktor nodded to each of them, then turned to Hermione.

"Miss Granger?"

"Hermione"

"Er-my-own-knee" Viktor said, causing Hermione to wince and a few of the others to grin. Harry watched his friend for a moment, then decided to take pity on her.

"Mr Krum?" The Durmstrang student turned to him "Perhaps, if she is okay with it, you can call her Minnie?" He saw Hermione glare at him, then she nodded in resignation.

"Minnie" Viktor smiled, then looked around. He turned to his students "Go ahead. I will catch you up" They nodded, and walked off down the corridor towards the hall. Viktor watched them go, then

turned back to the four students. He stood there for a moment, then Hermione took a step forward.

"Would you like to join us?" She asked "We were just going to dinner ... do you have to sit with your school?"

"I do not know" Viktor shrugged "But I will walk with you - if you will permit it?" Harry, Sally and Luna all turned to Hermione with a questioning look. She paused, then nodded. Harry glanced across at Sally, and they both smirked.

A moment later, they fell in to formation as they walked along the corridor, making sure that Viktor and Hermione were walking together, while Harry walked along between Luna and Sally.

"So - why do you think I should not be doing this?" Viktor asked.

"You could get killed" Hermione replied "Don't you think that if you are going to risk your life, you should do it for something worthwhile, rather than a stupid contest?"

"You watch Quidditch, yes?"

"Yes" She smiled "I saw you play this summer - you were very good"

"Thank you" He smiled back at her, and Harry felt Sally's hand squeeze his "And your students play Quidditch here?"

"Yes" She replied hesitantly.

"Is that... worthwhile?" Viktor stared at her for a moment "Everyone who plays could be killed. Should they not play?" He continued to stare at her, and she blushed.

"I guess I hadn't thought of it that way" She replied, then asked "Are you going to enter?"

"Yes" He nodded "I am honoured to represent my school, and my country" He smiled at the others "You are all to young, yes?"

"Yes" Sally replied "But there are a few Hogwarts students who have already said they will enter, if they are given the chance"

"Is there anyone I should be worried about?"

"Are you sure we should tell you?" Luna asked with a smile "After all - there are those who might consider you to be the opposition"

"Maybe, maybe not" Viktor smiled back, then stopped as they reached the doors to the great hall, then turned to Harry "Mr Potter?"

"Call me Harry"

"Harry - will you assist me?"

"By all means" The two of them stepped forward and then pushed the doors open. They walked in to the hall, and each stood to the side as the three girls followed them in. When everyone was inside, they turned, and pushed the doors closed after them. Then Viktor turned back to the group.

"Well - this is where I should join my school"

"Are you sure you don't want to sit with us?" Sally asked, causing Hermione to glare at her a little.

"Maybe later" He replied "But, for tonight, I should sit with my country men and schoolmates" He gave a short bow, then turned, and walked over to where the rest of the Durmstrang students were sat, while the others all walked over to the Gryffindor table.

xoxox

Dumbledore watched the group as they entered the hall, and as the interaction between the two groups before they split off for their own tables. He saw McGonagall frown as Luna sat down next to Hermione at the Gryffindor table, but he had bigger things on his mind.

A potential friendship between Harry and Viktor Krum was something that should be nipped in the bud as soon as possible. Quite apart from his own plans, Krum was a product of the Durmstrang School of Magic, and as such was schooled in Dark Magic. He had initially objected to Durmstrang being included in the tournament, but after both Fudge and Crouch had pointed out that the only other magic school that was eligible was a small institute in the south of Wales, that had around one hundred students, Dumbledore had been forced to agree.

"Albus - are you ready?" He turned to see Barty Crouch staring at him "We should start the ceremony"

"Yes, of course" Dumbledore cast one last glance at Harry and his friends, then stood up, and walked to the front of the table.

"On behalf of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and The British Ministry Of Magic, I welcome you all to the start of The Tri-Wizard Tournament. In a moment, I will turn this over to the man who made all this possible, Bartemius Crouch, but first I have a few announcements to make about the arrangements for the visiting students while they are here" He paused, and looked down to the end of Gryffindor table before continuing.

"After consulting with Madam Maxine, and Master Karkaroff, it has been decided that the students will stay in one of the empty wings of the castle. They will have their own common rooms, and their own dorms" He looked around "They will also be able to attend classes with our students if they chose, but, obviously, will not be part of the house system" He smiled "There will be further information about this, however I think I have talked for long enough. So now, may I present the Head of The Department for International Magical Co-Operation, Mr Bartemius Crouch"

There was a mild smattering of applause as he stood aside, and Crouch waited for it to die down.

"Thank you, Headmaster" He turned to face the assembled students "The rules of the tournament are very simple. A champion will be chosen from each school, and the three champions will take part in three tasks, designed to test the very limits of your skill, intelligence and magical abilities" He paused to look around.

"Anyone who has come of age can enter their name for selection, and from these names a champion will be chosen for each school. But you should all be aware that, by submitting your name for selection, you are entering a magically binding contract, and - if you are chosen as a champion, you have no choice but to compete in all three tasks" He stared around again "So, I advise all of you not to enter in to this lightly, or on a whim, because once you are chosen, there is no backing out" There was a few moments of silence, then he gestured to the group at the back. Everyone turned to see a group of four men carrying a large, covered object up the middle aisle of the hall.

When they reached the front, they set it down carefully, and then moved to one side as Crouch stepped forward again.

"To ensure that the choosing of The Champions is fair and unbiased, all those who want to compete will put their names in to this" He pulled the cover off, to reveal a huge, stone cup, brimming with blue fire "The Goblet Of Fire has been used to determine the champions, ever since the tournament began. You have one week to submit your name, if you wish to take part, and, one week from today, the Goblet will decide on the champions. The first task will take place at the end of November, with the other two following in the new year" He looked around "Thank you"

xoxox

"Mr Potter" Professor McGonagall walked up to the Gryffindor table, and, after casting a glance at Luna, approached Harry "The Headmaster would like to see you in his office"

"Okay" He gave Sally a quick smile, then stood up and followed McGonagall out of the hall. Sally watched him go, then turned back to Hermione and Luna.

"Krum?"

"Pardon?" Hermione went red. Both Luna and Sally giggled, then Sally continued.

"I meant - do you think it is about Krum?" Hermione stared at her, then nodded.

"Oh" She looked at the doors Harry had just walked out of "Probably, yes" She turned back "I suspect that Dumbledore doesn't want him expanding his circle of friends, especially one that comes from Durmstrang"

"What about us?" Luna asked with a sly look "Do you think we should make friends with someone from Durmstrang?" Hermione blushed again.

"I think if we are going to embrace co-operation between schools, then we should..."

"Embrace people from that school?" Sally laughed as the expression on her friend's face "Sorry - it was too easy to resist"

"Well - try" Hermione glared at her, then smiled "So - do you think he will be forbidden from talking to Viktor?"

"Probably" Sally sighed "Anyway - enough of Harry's problems. Minnie - you know a lot about the castle, right?"

"Yes" Hermione said hesitantly, wondering where her friend was going.

"And if someone wanted a tour, you would be able to do it, right?"

"I guess"

"Excellent" She stood up "So - should I ask Viktor if he wants a tour?" She paused, then continued "I'll take that 'DIE NOW' glare as a yes, shall I?" Hermione glared at her for a moment, then nodded "Don't worry, Min - you won't regret this"

"And yet every time you say that..." Hermione grinned at her, then stood up "Oh come on - let's get this over with"

xoxox

"Good evening, Harry"

"Professor"

"How is the start of term going?"

"Well - no one has tried to kill me yet, so I would say that so far it is my best year yet, sir"

"Indeed" Dumbledore paused "I noticed that Miss Lovegood seems to be spending a lot of time with you and your friends"

"Yes, sir"

"Don't you think she would be better making friends in her own house?" Harry stared at him in surprise.

"With all due respect, sir, I don't think you know enough about her situation to decide what is best for her"

"Pardon me?"

"She is bullied, sir" Harry said in a serious tone "Her housemates bully her - hide her stuff and tease her. They have done this since her first year, and no one - not you, not Flitwick, not anyone else, has done anything to stop it" He turned and glared at the Headmaster "So no, sir, I don't think she would be better off making friends in her own house, and, while I can't speak for Sally and Hermione, I have every intention of staying friends with her for as long as she wants" He stared at Dumbledore, until the Headmaster nodded.

"Would you like me to do something about it?" Dumbledore asked.

"You would have to ask Luna, sir" Harry replied "But I suspect she will say no. She believes it is something she has to put up with, because of her nature" He shook his head "And I also think that if you do try to put your foot down, it will only make things worse"

"Very well, I will take it under advisement" Dumbledore replied "How do you know Viktor Krum?"

"I don't sir" Harry said in surprise "I mean - I know of him, and I saw him at the World Cup, but I don't know him aside from that"

"You and he walked in to the hall together, in what seemed to be a friendly manner"

"Oh - that" Harry smiled "We met him on the way down to the hall, and asked if he would like to walk with us. He seemed nice enough, sir, and we thought we should make him feel welcome" He looked at the Headmaster "Did we do something wrong, sir?"

"Not as such, Harry, but I think you should be wary of your associations"

"Sir?"

"The Daily Prophet has already suggested that your godfather is leading you astray. If you now make friends with someone from a school that is known to teach Dark Arts, what do you think Miss Skeeter will make of that?"

"I am not sure it is any of her business, sir" Harry replied "And if Krum, and the other students are as dangerous as you seem to think, why did you let them in the school?"

"That is none of your concern, Harry" Dumbledore replied "All I want to know is are you going to continue your friendship with Krum?"

"With all due respect, sir, it is none of your business either" Harry said "I will make friends with who I chose, not those who are chosen for me" He smiled "After all - I made friends with Hermione and Sally, all on my own, and they haven't steered me wrong, have they?" He saw Dumbledore frown, and resisted the urge to laugh "If that is all, sir, I should be getting back. I have homework to do"

"Very well - you are dismissed" Dumbledore watched him leave, and sighed. If Harry made friends with the boy who was most likely going to be the Durmstrang champion, then his plans would prove a lot harder to carry out. Then he thought about The Daily Prophet, and realised there might be an answer to his problems.



## Chapter 6

"So - how did it go?" Sally, Luna, Hermione and Krum had caught up with Harry about ten minutes after he had left the Headmaster's office. She had taken one look at the expression on his face and given him a hug. He had hugged her back, then taken her hand as the group walked along the halls.

"Oh, you know - the usual" He replied with a smirk "He thinks that he has a better idea of who my friends should be than I do. I disagreed" He glanced across at Luna, who smiled back, and then at Viktor, who was staring at Hermione and didn't notice "I think the next week or so is going to prove interesting"

"Oh honey" Sally squeezed his hand "Have you ever considered... well - there are other schools" The group came to a sudden halt as Hermione turned to stare at them.

"Leaving Hogwarts?" She asked "Really?"

"It was just something we discussed" Harry said, glancing at Sally "If Dumbledore starts to interfere too much, then Sirius thinks that Sally and I can get enrolled in another magical school fairly easily"

"But..."

"We haven't decided anything" Sally continued "We are not just going to abandon you, Minnie" She glanced to her left "Nor you, Luna. We just wanted to explore our options"

"Oh" Hermione gave a sigh of relief "Okay" She turned to Viktor "I suppose you are wondering about all this?"

"A little" He replied "But I do not think it is any of my business"

"No, it isn't" Harry said with a smile "And I am sorry to drag you in to all this" He turned to Hermione "So - you were giving a tour?"

xoxox

A few days later, they walked in to The Great Hall with Viktor, just in time to see Fred and George Weasley gearing up to put their names in to the Goblet.

"It won't work" Hermione told the rest of her group "You see the white line around The Goblet? It's an age line, drawn by Dumbledore himself"

"And you don't think what ever the twins come up with will be able to bypass it?" Harry asked, then smacked himself on the head "Stupid question really"

"But" Luna said with a smile "It's going to be fun watching them try" The five of them moved to one side of the hall, and sat down.

In the center of the hall, the twins stared at the line for a moment, then they both took a drink from a phial they were holding. They waited a moment, then both smiled.

"So - are you ready for this?" Fred asked. The crowd cheered "Then let's get it on!" They both walked through the hazy line and, when nothing happened, they both cheered again, along with the crowd. A moment later, they both reached up to put a piece of paper in to the flaming chalice.

For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then suddenly the Goblet spat out the two pieces of paper, and flung the two red-heads halfway across the hall in a blinding flash of light.

As the light faded, the assembled students started to giggle. The twins had been turned in to four year old kids, looking swamped in their uniforms. They both stared at each other, then they scampered out of the hall to the accompanying laughter of the rest of the students.

"So - you still think we shouldn't take part?" Luna asked. She glanced at Harry "I am sure you were cute as a child"

"Thank you" He smirked "But I think I will forgo that pleasure for today" He turned to Viktor "I believe this is your moment of glory?" Viktor bowed slightly, then turned and walked towards The Goblet. As he strode across the hall, the other students fell silent, watching his progress. He crossed the age line as if it didn't exist, and then lifted his hand and placed a piece of paper in to the center of the fire. The entire hall held its breath for a moment, then the four students at the end let out a huge cheer as the flames turned bright green for a moment, then returned to dull red. Viktor raised his hand in triumph, then turned, and walked back to the group.

"Jacta alea est?" Hermione asked with a smile, then threw her hands up in resignation when all but Luna stared at her with blank looks "Why do I bother?" She turned to Viktor "Any regrets?"

"No" He smiled "Even if I am not chosen, it is an honour just to be considered" He smiled at all of them "And thank you for supporting me" He glanced as a student in a Hogwarts' uniform came in to the hall "Are you sure you do not wish to support one of your own?" They all turned to see Cedric Diggory walk up to The Goblet, and put his name in. A moment later, the flames flashed green, and he walked away to numerous cheers from the rest of the students. Hermione and Harry turned back to the Durmstrang student.

"We haven't been one of Hogwarts' own for a while now" Harry said in a bitter tone, but then added in a lighter tone "And we stick by our friends"

xoxox

"Good evening" Dumbledore's voice rang out through the hall "For the past week, many of you have been submitting your names to take part in the Tournament. And although some of you" He stared at the Weasley twins "Haven't been as successful as you might like, this tournament has seen the most names submitted for nearly two hundred years"

"And the fact this contest hasn't been held for nearly one hundred and fifty years has nothing to do with that" Hermione whispered, causing the other four students to burst in to laughter. Dumbledore glanced over at them, then turned his attention back to the rest of the crowd.

"However, only three of you can be chosen for the honour of taking part, only three of you can compete for the eternal glory and fame that awaits the winner of this historic competition" Dumbledore turned to The Goblet "And, we are about to find out who those three champions will be!" Everyone turned to where The Goblet was now spewing out red and blue fire. Dumbledore strode over to it, and stood in front of it. For a moment, nothing happened, then the magical chalice erupted in to green fire and a piece of paper flew out of the top. The assembled students watched in silence as it fluttered down in to Dumbledore's hand. He read it, then looked up.

"The Champion for Beauxbaton Academy is... FLEUR DELEACOUR!!"

There was a burst of applause from the Beauxbaton students, and a few of the others around the hall, as a young blonde girl from the French school walked up to the Headmaster, shook hands, and then disappeared in to a room in the back of the hall. Dumbledore turned back, and looked up again as the

Goblet started pulsing. A moment later another piece of paper shot out.

"The Champion for Hogwarts School is... CEDRIC DIGGORY!!"

A huge burst of applause filled the hall as the seventh year Hufflepuff stood up, and strutted to the front of the hall and shook hands with the Headmaster. Then, after a few more minutes of applause, he turned and vanished in to the same room as Fleur. As the applause died down, The Goblet shot out another piece of paper in to Dumbledore's hand. He looked down and read it out.

"The Champion for Durmstrang School is... VIKTOR KRUM!!"

The Bulgarians jumped to their feet, clapping for their Champion, but Dumbledore stared down the hall in surprise as Harry and his friends were also joining in the applause. He turned as Krum walked up to him, and he shook his hand, then pointed him to the room at the back of the hall.

"So - we have our Three Champions!" He announced "Over the next few months, they will be tested their limits, in trials of skill, ability and courage, and - in the end - we will have one..." He trailed off, staring at The Goblet Of Fire. It was now spewing out red and blue fire again, as it had three times before. The hall fell silent as everyone stared at the spectacle, then gasped as another name shot out of the fires, and fluttered down in to Dumbledore's hands. The Headmaster stared at it, then looked up at the far end of the hall.

xoxox

Harry stared back at The Headmaster, then dropped his head in to his hands. Sally watched him for a moment, then shook her head in disbelief.

"Well - that sucks" She sighed.

"Sal?"

"Wait for it" The three of them turned back to Dumbledore, who took a deep breath, then announced the fourth name to come out of The Goblet.

"HARRY POTTER"

The hall fell in to silence again, as everyone turned to stare at the Fourth Champion, who still had his head in his hands.

"HARRY POTTER" Dumbledore called out again. Harry looked up, then turned to Sally and Hermione.

"I have to go up there - he won't shut up until I do - but I need one of you to summon Sirius and Susan. Whatever is going to happen, I think I am going to need their help"

"I'll go" Hermione said. She stood up, then turned, gave him a hug, then walked out of the hall. Harry and Sally watched her go, then turned back as Dumbledore called his name out again.

"I guess I should go then" He stood up, but Sally stood up next to him "Sal?"

"If you think you are doing this alone, think again" She turned to Luna "Could you do us a favour?"

"Of course"

"Can you wait here for Minnie and our parents?" She looked around "And also keep an eye on everyone else?"

"You think someone is behind this?" Harry asked, then shook his head "Of course someone is behind this"

"Good luck" Luna said, squeezing his hand. Harry smiled, then he and Sally joined hands, and walked up the hall.

xoxox

"SUSAN" Hermione appeared in the kitchen, and yelled before she realised Susan was stood by the sink. Sally's mother turned in surprise and dropped the plate she had been holding.

"Min? What are you doing here?"

"Harry's in trouble" She said "You need to get to Hogwarts now. Sirius is already on his way" As she vanished, Sirius came through the door.

"Susan - Hermione said..."

"I know" She walked towards the floo "Lets go"

xoxox

"Miss Perks?" Dumbledore turned in surprise "What are you doing?"

"I am with Harry, sir"

"Only Tri-Wizard Champions are permitted..."

"Then stun me and stop me" She glared at him "Because that's the only way you will do it" She took Harry's hand and they walked in to the room. Dumbledore watched them go, then turned back to the hall "Could Mr Crouch, Mr Bagman, Madam Maxine and Master Karkaroff come with me please. It seems we have a minor problem to sort out"

xoxox

"Who are you?" Fleur glared at him.

"Harry?" Viktor walked over to him "Sally? Why are you here?"

"Some how I have been named as The Fourth Champion" Harry sighed "My name came out of The Goblet" The other three stared at him for a moment.

"This is ridiculous!" Fleur yelled, while Cedric glared at him.

"Couldn't stand to let your old house get the glory, eh, Perks?"

"Yes, Diggory - that's right. I used my all powerful magic to confuse an ancient artefact so that my boyfriend - the boy I love more than

anyone else in the world - can risk his life and probably die in a contest that he never wanted to enter" She smiled "At least we know why you aren't a Ravenclaw" Before Cedric could reply, the door to the room opened, and Dumbledore came in, followed by Crouch, Bagman, Karkaroff and Madam Maxine. Then, a moment later, he smiled as Sirius and Susan came in, followed by Professors McGonagall and Moody.

"Mr Black?" Dumbledore turned "May I ask..."

"My nephew has just been told he has to enter a tournament despite being under-age" Sirius said firmly "I don't think that it is entirely beyond reason that his guardian should be here" Dumbledore stared at him for a moment, then turned back to Harry.

"Can you explain this, Harry?"

"No, sir" Harry shook his head "I didn't put my name in it"

"Did you ask anyone else to..."

"No, sir" He shook his head again "And I am not going to take part"

"You have no choice, Mr Potter" Mr Crouch stared down at him "The Goblet Of Fire forms a magical contract, and once you submit your name, you are bound to compete"

"What happens if you don't?" Sally asked.

"Pardon me?" Crouch turned to the young girl "Miss..."

"Sally-Ann Perks, sir" She replied "What happens if Harry doesn't take part?"

"The Goblet will curse him, and his magical core will collapse" Moody said in a dark tone. Everyone turned and stared at the boy, who shrugged.

"Fair enough. I am not going to take part" He smiled at Sally, who took his hand again. Sirius walked over to him.

"You sure about this?" Harry nodded, then Sirius looked around and then turned to Dumbledore "Can we go somewhere private for a moment?"

"Of course" Dumbledore pointed them to a small room, and Sally, Susan, Sirius and Harry went in to it. They closed the door behind them, then Sirius cast a silencing charm.

"Harry - are you sure about this?"

"Yes" Harry said firmly "I am through being manipulated"

"But... living as a muggle?" Susan asked "Can you do that?" Harry looked across at Sally, then turned back.

"Has the magical world been that good to me?" He asked "Quirrell, Lockheart, the Basilisk, Dementors, Lucius and lets not forget Voldemort" He shrugged "I can't imagine the muggle-world will be any worse" Sally smirked.

"What?" Sirius asked.

"The Prophecy" She said "Dumbledore is never going to allow Harry to become a muggle, and if there is any way out of this, he will make sure it happens" The two adults stared at the kids in surprise.

"Why aren't you in Slytherin again?" Sirius asked with a smile.

"Just lucky, I guess" Sally smirked. The four of them walked back in to the main room, then Sirius walked over to Dumbledore.

"May I have a word, Headmaster?"

"Of course" They walked in to the smaller room again "So, Mr Black, how can I be of assistance?"

"You have to get Harry out of the tournament" Sirius said in a matter of fact tone.

"You heard Bartemius - it can't be done"

"You need Harry more than Harry needs you, Headmaster" Sirius glared at him "Are you sure there is nothing that can be done?"

"So Harry is serious?" Dumbledore paled.

"Yes, Albus, he is" Sirius smiled "So - what are you going to do about it?"



xoxox

While they were waiting for Sirius and Dumbledore, Harry and Sally had gone over to Cedric.

"Cedric - I just wanted to say I am sorry about this" Harry said "I wanted nothing to do with this, and I didn't mean to steal your thunder" Cedric stared at them for a moment, then shrugged.

"I am still going to kick your ass, Potter"

"Whatever" Sally took her boyfriend's hand, and walked back to where Susan was stood "What do you think..." The door opened, and Sirius came out with Dumbledore "I guess we are going to find out"

"Mr Crouch, I believe that, since Harry did not put his name in to The Goblet, nor did anyone do it on his behalf, that it will not consider him to be an active contestant" Dumbledore looked down at Harry "You are excused, Mr Potter - and I do not believe that you will suffer any side-effects from not taking part"

Harry stared at him in disbelief for a moment, then shrugged. He turned to Sally and raised his eyebrows. She nodded, and they both turned and left the room, followed by Sirius and Susan. As they emerged in to the Great Hall, they were met with lot of glares and frowns. Harry turned to Sirius who took a step forward.

"My Nephew has been vindicated, and will not be taking part in the tournament" He announced in a loud voice "So, if you will excuse us, we will be leaving" He turned back to Harry, then the four of them walked to the end of the hall, and - along with Hermione and Luna, left the Great Hall.

xoxox

"So - it worked?" A whispering voice said.

"Yes sir" Came the reply.

"Excellent. He will be off his guard, and never see it coming"

"Should we attack now?"

"No, my faithful servant" The voice hissed "Let him relax. Let him enjoy the year. And then - when he believes he is safe, we will strike, and destroy him then"

## Chapter 7

"Today, we will be learning about Veritaserum" Slughorn stood in front of the class and beamed at them. He was enjoying being back at Hogwarts, and, he had to admit, Dumbledore had told him the truth about the students in his classes. The Perks girl was good - even if she hadn't chosen to follow in her father's footsteps, and, from the first few classes, teaching The Boy Who Lived was everything he had expected "Who can tell me what it is?" He looked around, then turned to the Granger girl who, as always, had put her hand up first "Miss Granger?"

"Veritaserum is a powerful truth potion, that will force anyone who is drinking it to tell the truth when asked a question"

"Very good" He smiled, then continued "We will start the process of brewing it today, but it takes a long while to complete, so it will be an assignment for the rest of the term" He waved his wand at the board "These are the ingredients, and as you can see..."

xoxox

"Mr Potter, Miss Perks - could you remain behind for a moment?"

"Will you be okay?" Sally asked Hermione. She nodded, then turned and walked out. Sally watched her go, then turned back to see Professor Slughorn approaching them "How may we be of assistance, Professor?"

"Actually, Miss Perks, it is I who can be of assistance to you" Slughorn smiled "Or I think I can"

"Really, sir?" Sally smiled "How?"

"Well - I don't know if you have heard of it, but I have been running an informal... club, for want of a better phrase" He smiled at them again "I invite a few of my top students to my quarters, to discuss current events, and things of that nature"

"And you think we fall in to that category?" Harry asked, looking surprised.

"Well - I have been talking to some of the other students, and staff, and by all accounts you two are very close to the top of your class" He looked over at Sally "And, Miss Perks, I hear that you are a very talented Quidditch player"

"Who told you that?"

"I think it was Professor McGonagall" Sally laughed, causing Slughorn to raise his eyebrows in surprise "Miss Perks?"

"I can't imagine she was very complimentary when she told you, sir" Sally smirked "And although I should blush to say it myself, I am better than most of the students here - I just object to playing for people who don't like me all that much"

"I can understand that" He nodded "But, that aside, I would say you have a pretty good future ahead of you" He turned to Harry "As do you, Mr Potter"

"Thank you sir" Harry smiled, then added "But if we are both being honest, a lot of our academic proficiency is down to Hermione"

"Miss Granger? The Muggle-born?"

"Yes, sir" Harry's tone hardened at the look of disbelief on the professor's face "Hermione is one of the smartest witches in the school, and definitely the best in the year"

"Ah - well. I should have guessed" He smiled affectionately at Harry "Your mother, if I remember, was one of the best in the year"

"Really?" Harry's tone lightened for a moment "You taught my mother?"

"Didn't you know?"

"I didn't know you had taught here before, sir" Harry said.

"Well - you learn something new every day" Sally smiled, then looked over at Harry "So - what do you think?"

"Sorry?"

"I think she is asking about the invitation, Mr Potter" Slughorn said  
"And I would like to extend it to Miss Granger, if you will carry it for me?"

"We would be happy to, sir" Sally said.

"Thank you"

xoxox

"A party?" Hermione looked up "And he invited me?" She saw Harry and Sally glance at each other "What?"

"It's nothing" Harry replied, then, when Hermione continued to stare at him "Well - it is something, but not here" He glanced around the common room "So - do you want to come?"

"Will I need to find a date?" She asked.

"He didn't say" Sally said "But I don't think he asked the both of us because we are a couple - I think he asked both of us because I am my father's daughter, and Harry is The Boy Who... whatever they are calling him now"

"I think it is The Boy Who Cheated To Get In To The Tri Wizard Tournament Then Couldn't Face It And Chickened Out Like The Gryffindor He Isn't" Hermione said with a smile, then burst out laughing at the expression on Harry's face "Take a guess at which of our illustrious housemates that came from"

"Normally I would say we should have another trip out" Harry said with a frown "But I think that we should curtail our activities for the year, given what Vanessa said" He paused "Unless, you know, they really piss us off"

"So - you'll come?" Sally asked.

"Okay" Hermione nodded "Who knows - maybe I will meet someone"

xoxoxo

"Miss Weasley - would you remain behind?"

xoxox

"Harry!" Ginny's voice resounded through the common room as Harry came in through the portrait hole.

"I wanted to go to The Chamber" He whispered to Sally "But no - you wanted to come back here" She smirked at him.

"Consider this part of your training, grasshopper"

"Really?" He raised his eyebrows "Which part, specifically?"

"Endurance training?" She said hopefully "Learning to deal with things that annoy you? Improves your patience and so forth?"

"You are good" He smiled "But don't forget our deal"

"I know" They both turned to face the red-head who was now approaching them.

"Miss Weasley - what can I do for you?" Harry asked.

"Professor Slughorn has invited me to a party in his quarters on the night before The First Task" She said in a bubbly voice "He said I could bring a guest - would you like to come with me?" Even though he couldn't see her face, Harry could feel the frown Sally gave the girl in front of them. He took her hand and squeezed it. She turned, then gave a slight nod.

"I am already going" He said "Professor Slughorn invited the three of us to the same party"

"So I will see you there?" She asked.

"Along with Sally and Hermione" Harry said with another smile. Ginny looked at them for a moment, debating whether to say anything else, then smiled, turned and flounced away. They watched her go, then Sally turned to her boyfriend.

"As annoying as the wacky Slytherin is, she has given me an idea"

"Really?"

"Yes" She pulled him back towards the portrait hole, and then through it.

"Does this idea involve lots of kissing in a private classroom?"

"No" Sally said, then, at the puppy-dog look he gave her, she added "Well - not yet"

"Yay!" He looked around as she pulled him along "The library?"

"Well - if The Wacky Slytherin can bring a date, then why not the smartest witch in a generation?"

"Ahhh" Harry nodded "You are thinking about Viktor?"

"Who else?"

xoxox

They arrived at the library a few minutes later, and Sally spotted Hermione at a table in the charms section. As they walked up to it, however, they could see she was not sat on her own.

"So - given that you are excellent on a broom, do you think you could use that?" Hermione turned to Viktor.

"Hermione?" Both students turned to the new comers "What's up?"

"Well..." She looked a little shy "Viktor came in looking for some information, so I offered to help him"

"Oh" Sally sat down next to them, and indicated Harry should as well. He looked around for a moment, then sat down next to his girlfriend "So - what were you looking for?" Krum glanced around, then, after checking the area was empty, gave a small smile.

"I know what The First Task will be" He said with a grin.

"How?"

"I can not say" He shook his head "I gave my word"

"Okay"

"But we have to deal with a dragon" This announcement was greeted with silence "I think we have to get something that it will be guarding"

"Wow" Sally said, glancing at Harry "Aren't you glad you got out of it?"

"Oh yes" He turned back to Viktor "So - you are thinking you can out fly it on a broom?"

"Yes" The Bulgarian smiled at them "You may have noticed I am a good flyer" They all chuckled at his statement "But I am not allowed to start with anything other than my wand"

"A summoning charm?" Hermione asked, and Viktor's smile lit up.

"Yes" He smiled "I think that might work" He looked at Sally and Harry "What do you think?"

"I think there is a reason that Minnie is known as the smartest witch" Sally said. Hermione blushed.

"Was there a reason you came here originally?" She asked, trying to divert attention.

"Yes" Harry said with a smile "We found out from the Wacky Slytherin that you can invite a guest to Slughorn's party, if you want" He glanced across at Viktor "We thought you might want to know"

"Thank you" Hermione glared at him "But it turns out that the Three Champions have already been invited, and Viktor has asked if I will go with him"

"And Minnie has said she will" He made no attempt to disguise his smile. Then both he and Hermione turned to stare at their friends, who were also smiling.

"Excellent" Sally gave them both a big grin "This should be a lot of fun"

xoxoxo

"Harry - welcome" Slughorn boomed "And Miss Perks, Miss Granger and... I didn't know you knew Mr Krum?"

"We met on his first day" Hermione said with a smile "We offered to show him around"

"And it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship?" Slughorn asked with a wink, cause both Hermione and Viktor to blush, and Harry and Sally to smirk "Anyway - welcome, and enjoy the party. There is



a table of drinks on the other side, and food will be served in a little while"

"Thank you professor" Hermione said, then the group walked off in to the crowd. Slughorn watch them go, then turned to greet his next guest "Miss Lovegood - welcome"

xoxox

"Enjoying yourself Harry?" Harry looked up as Luna sat down next to him.

"It's a little different from what I was expecting, but yes" He smiled at her "Mostly it is fun. What about you?"

"It is quite nice" She said lightly "Better than spending an evening with my Housemates"

"Luna?"

"Yes Harry?"

"You know that Sally was asked to be resorted? In her first year?"

"I did hear about that" She smiled fondly "It was quite a scandal in certain circles you know"

"I can believe that" He gave a small chuckle.

"And you are going to ask me why I haven't asked to do the same thing?" She turned to him, and stared in to his eyes.

"It must have occurred to you that you could ask" He said.

"It has" She paused, then shrugged "But I am a child of Rowena, and even if I were to move, I would still be a child of Rowena" She smiled at him "But thank you for looking out for me. I know you told the Headmaster, and that you asked him not to do anything" She held up her hand "I know you feel sorry for me, but, Harry, in comparison to everything else, my problems are insignificant"

"No" He shook his head softly "They aren't" She looked over at him, then leaned over, and gave him a warm hug.

xoxox

From the other side of the room, Rita Skeeter turned from where she had been talking to Ginny, and watched the exchange between the two students, and smiled. When Luna stood up, and walked over to where Viktor and Hermione were talking, she decided to try to get the interview she had been declined before. She took out her transcription quill - ever since Sirius Black's press conference, there had been a general rebellion against Quick Quote Quills, and she had been forced to stop using them - and walked over to where Harry was sat.

"Mr Potter, I was wondering if I could have a word?" She said in a breezy voice.

"That depends on who you are" He looked her up and down "You're not a student"

"I'm Rita Skeeter, from the Daily Prophet"

"Then no - you may not have a word" His face hardened as he glared at her.

"Why not? Do you have something to hide?"

xoxox

"You have a very sweet boyfriend Sally" Luna said with a smile "But, for all his courage, I think he might need rescuing" Sally turned, then frowned.

"Thank you. I'll be right back" She marched over to where Rita was talking to Harry "Harry, love, have you talked to Uncle Mike today?"

"No" Harry shook his head "Why?"

"Oh - I just assumed you had got permission to talk to Miss Skeeter" She turned to the reporter, and spoke in a calm voice "Unless the law has been changed. Miss Skeeter - has the law been changed? Can you now interview under-age students without their guardian's permission?"

"No" Rita continued to glare at her "The law hasn't been changed. I was just having an informal chat with Mr Potter"

"Then I assume that nothing Harry says will be appearing in the paper?" Sally continued to speak in a calm tone.

"Of course not" Rita shook her head and laughed "Do you really think I would break our paper's ethics?" She stood up and, with a final glance at Sally, walked away from the couple. Sally watched her go, then turned back "Well - that was fun"

"Is that really true?" Harry looked curious "About the interviewing thing?"

"Oh yes" She sat down next to him, and took his hand "It was introduced a while back, to stop underage students from being tricked in to dishonouring their family through the press" She leaned over and rested her head on his shoulder "You know this won't be the end of it" She felt him nod.

"She won't be happy that you stopped her talking to me, and - after the summer and the Black Magic stories - I can't imagine that she will take this lying down"

"Probably not" She gave another sigh, then looked over to the far side of the room "Minnie and Viktor seem to be having fun" Harry looked up, and smiled at the sight of Viktor leaning in to whisper something to Hermione, and her giggling in response.

"Do you think they have a future?" He asked.

"Maybe" She said, then added in a darker tone "Assuming he doesn't get eaten by a dragon with in the next twenty four hours"

"That would put a bit of a damper on the relationship" Harry smiled "But I think he should be okay"

xoxox

"Good night, Minnie" Viktor had walked back with them to Gryffindor Tower "Will I see you tomorrow?"

"I will be there, cheering you on" She gave him a big smile "Just remember to leave your broom somewhere you can summon it"

"I remember" He smiled softly "Do not worry about me. I will be fine"

"I know" She turned "Well - this is my stop" She paused, then lean forward and gave him a soft kiss on the lips "Be safe" He smiled back at her.

"I will"

## Chapter 8

“So – where are we going to sit?” Sally asked Hermione. The four of them were walking down to where The First Task was going to take place, and three of the four were looking to Hermione.

“Why are you asking me?” She asked in reply.

“Because we aren't the ones who want to get in to Viktor's...”

“LUNA!” Hermione blushed, then glared at her friend “But for you information, I talked to Viktor last night, and he has said we can sit with Josef and his friends, if we want to” She looked at them “I said I would, but that doesn't mean you have to sit with us”

“Where else are we going to sit?” Harry said with a smile “With The Weasleys?” Hermione laughed at the expression on his face, then nodded in agreement.

xoxox

“Welcome to the start of The Tri-Wizard Tournament” Fudge's voice boomed out across the Quidditch stands “Today, we will see The Three Champions compete, but not against each other” He paused, letting the tension build “Instead, each will test their skill, cunning and ingenuity against one of nature's most noble and deadly beasts” He turned, and gestured to the a group of men who were bringing a covered cage in to the arena

“Our first contestant, chosen by lot earlier today, is Miss Fleur Delacour, from Beauxbaton's school of magic” The girl strode out of a tent on the far side to thunderous applause from her own school, and polite applause from the others “And she will be trying to steal the golden egg you see down there” He gestured to the centre of the stadium “From under the nose of a Green Welsh Dragon” The cover was ripped off the cage, then it collapsed, to reveal a scaly green dragon, that at once moved over to where the golden egg was located.

“They are setting a DRAGON loose in a SCHOOL?” Harry asked “Are they mental?”

"Look at its leg" Hermione said "It's chained down, so it can only move around in the stadium" She pointed over to where Dumbledore and the other Head-Teachers were sat "And there are a number of magical charms around the pitch to protect us, so we should be safe"

"Should be?" Harry turned to her "SHOULD be?"

"Well – given that we have been attacked by Quirrell, Lockheart, a snake, several dozen dementors and Lucius Malfoy, I am not entirely convinced that Dumbledore's idea of safety is anything like mine, so I took a few extra precautions"

"You don't think that..." He looked around, but no one was paying attention "That something will happen that involves us?"

"What?" Hermione stared at him in surprise, then shook her head "No - I don't think he would take it that far, even to prove a point about something" She looked around "There are too many people here to risk it"

"Then...what?"

"I am just worried that when he was setting all this up, something might have distracted him and he might have skipped a step" She stared over as Fleur was trying to charm the dragon "She isn't doing all that well, is she?"

"Not really" He concentrated on the dragon for a moment, then chuckled. Sally turned to stare at him "What?"

"I guess dragons are just giant snakes" He leaned over and whispered in her ear "This one is really unimpressed with Fleur - I have never heard so much sarcasm from a dragon before" He paused, and reconsidered his words "That wasn't entirely what I meant" Sally gave him a fond stare, but then they both turned as a massive cheer came from the Beauxbaton's section of the stands. They looked down, and saw Fleur waving the egg around above her head "What happened?"

"Apparently she got sick of trying to hypnotise the dragon" Luna said with a smile "So she turned in to a giant bird, and blew fire at the dragon, then stole the egg" Harry stared at her.

“Seriously?”

“Yup”

“Wow” They watched as the dragon-wrangers subdued the Green Welsh, then built the cage up around it again.

“And as the Beauxbaton Champion completes her task, the judges make their decision...” The crowd fell silent for a moment, then the four judges cast their scores in to the sky “...and Miss Delacour gets a score of 34 out of 40, which is a good start”

“Do you think it will be good enough?” Sally asked “I mean – no one gave her a ten, and I can't imagine that Karkaroff is going to be less than generous to Viktor” She glanced across at Hermione “Unless something goes wrong”

“And next up” Fudge's voice cut across their discussion “Is the Durmstrang Champion, VIKTOR KRUM”

The Durmstrang section jumped to their feet, and started yelling “KRUM!” and, knowing what the effect would be, the four students joined them, and continued to yell as Viktor walked out of the tent. He looked over to them, gave the group a brief wave, then took his place in front of the covered cage.

“And Mr Krum will be facing...” The cover was ripped off the cage, and Hermione gave a low moan “...The HUNGARIAN HORNTAIL!”

“Min?” Sally turned to her friend, who now had her head in her hands “You okay?”

“The single most dangerous dragon in the world” She said, still covering her eyes “I guess this was predictable” Sally turned back, to see Viktor hiding behind a large hunk of rock. After a few moments, sections of the crowd started to boo the Bulgarian Champion, but Harry and Luna had increased the volume of their cheering to try to drown the others out. Then the entire crowd fell silent as they spotted a small object shooting out of the sky towards the student who was apparently not just cowering behind a rock, but waiting for something.

“HE DID IT!” Hermione screamed in triumph, and bounded to her feet “YES!!”

Viktor caught the broom, then took off, flying up, away from the dragon. Harry let out another giggle, but waved his hand to direct their attention back to the unfolding drama. They all turned, and Sally gave a gasp of surprise as Viktor suddenly threw his broom in to a sharp, downward dive.

"A Wronski feint?" She turned to Harry "He is doing a feint above solid rock?" She turned to Hermione "You know your boyfriend is crazy, right?"

"He isn't my... YES! OH YES YES YES!!!" She threw her arms around Luna, who's eyes widened slightly. A moment later, Hermione released her, then turned to watch as Krum flew around the stadium, holding the golden egg aloft, before coming in to land in front of the judges.

"And Viktor Krum completes his task in unbelievably quick time" Fudge announced "While the judges confer, lets have one more round of applause for the Durmstrang Champion, VIKTOR KRUM!"

The group around Hermione went crazy, while the other students were more muted in their applause. Sally looked around, then turned to Harry.

"What was so funny earlier?" She asked. Harry stared at her for a moment, then he started laughing again.

"When Viktor shot straight up, the dragon expressed his surprise in a manner that would make a ten-year marine blush" He looked at her "Well - I thought it was funny"

"I can imagine" She gave him a hug, then turned back to watch judges give out their scores.

"And Mr Krum... gets 39!" Hermione, and the rest of the students around her, jumped to their feet, screaming and cheering as Viktor took another lap of honour in his broom, waving to the crowd.

"And as Mr Krum departs, we prepare for the final Champion, Mr Cedric Diggory of Hogwarts" This time the cheers came from the other side of the stadium, as all four houses jumped to their feet to welcome their champion. Sally watched them, then shrugged and sat down.



“So – do you think he can take first?” She asked Luna.

“There is the chance he might copy Viktor's style, but probably not as well” The blonde girl replied, then added “But he does have the home advantage, and...” She glanced over at the four judges “...there might be bias issues” Hermione followed her gaze, then shrugged.

“I don't think Karkaroff is going to be biased in favour of Diggory, so honestly I think that Vik has...”

“Vik?”

“...has a good chance” She blushed a little “I think I might have been deluding myself, so feel free to being the mocking as you see fit” Luna stared at her for a moment, then shrugged.

“I think you are good for each other” She smiled, then pointed “Cedric”

The noise level doubled as Cedric strode out of the tent and down to the starting mark. A moment later, the cover was ripped off the cage.

“And Mr Diggory will be facing the Chinese Fireball!” Fudge announced, then fell silent as Diggory strode forward, wand raised.

“Video Obscurum!” He yelled, but the dragon reared back, and the spell missed. Cedric took a step back, then cast the blinding spell again. It struck home, and he took a step forward. There was a brief cheer from the Hogwarts students, but it died as the dragon swept its tail round and smacked Cedric towards the left hand side. The crowd held its collective breath as he flew through the air, but released it in a cheer as the young student cast a spell to make himself rebound off the wall. As he landed on his feet, he pointed his wand at the egg.

“REDUCTO! REDUCTO!!” The spells flew across the stadium, and blew the stone holding the egg in to little bits. As the egg flew in to the air, still attached to part of the rock it had been resting on, he cast a final spell “ACCIO ROCK!”, and suddenly the egg flew to his hand. For a moment, no one spoke, then all of the Hogwarts students burst in to applause and cheers.

“And despite suffering minor set back, Mr Diggory retrieves the egg” He looked over to the judges “This completes The First Task, and, all the Champions may now proceed on to the next task, which will take place around the middle of February”

“That was pretty impressive” Sally said, then, catching Hermione's eye, she added “But not as impressive as Viktor was, of course”

“Of course”

“But my guess is that they will take points off for the injury” Sally continued “So, all things being equal, I think Viktor will be going in to the next task as the leader”

“Which is good?” Harry asked.

“Yes” She smiled “Well – maybe” She shrugged “I really don't know”

“That's my girl!”

“And the judges give Mr Diggory... 38 points!” There was a chorus of boos from the Hogwarts end of the stadium after Karkaroff's score was held up, but it was soon swamped by the applause as Cedric left the field.

“So Viktor Krum of Durmstrang goes in to The Second Task as leader. Thank you all for coming, and I hope to see you all in February”

xoxox

Half an hour later, the four students were waiting for Viktor to come out of the make-shift hospital tent – it seemed that, even though Viktor hadn't suffered any injuries, Madam Pomfrey wanted to check him out anyway. Hermione was bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet, while Harry and Sally stood to one side, watching Luna, who apparently found something very interesting in the clouds overhead.

“What's taking so long?” Hermione turned to the others “He wasn't hurt, so what are they checking?”

“Calm down Min” Harry walked over, and gave her a small hug “Fleur isn't out yet either, and she wasn't hurt” She turned, and smiled at him.

"I guess"

"Well – isn't this a pretty picture" All four students turned to see Ginny and Ron walking up behind them "Maybe Rita was right"

"Right about what?" Harry asked. Ginny sneered at him, then turned to Ron.

"Show him" Ron smiled as his sister, then handed over the newspaper he was holding. Harry took it, glanced at the paper, then turned and handed it to Sally. She skimmed over the front page, while Luna read it over her shoulder, then gave it to Hermione, who took one look at it, and gave a short laugh.

"This is it?" She laughed again "I admit it is quite entertaining, but then again so are the wizarding romance novels that Ginny keeps under her pillow" She smirked when the youngest Weasley blushed.

"So you are denying it's true?" Ron said, glancing at Luna, then turning back to Harry "You aren't dating Luna?"

"No - I am not dating Luna. She is a very good friend, but Sally is my girlfriend" He turned to Luna "No offence"

"None taken"

"Thank you" Harry turned back to Ron, taking Sally's hand in the process "Why would I be using Sally to hide a relationship with Luna?"

"Because Sirius is a Black, and his family line is important to him" He gave a quick glance at Luna, then turned back to Harry "What do you think he would make of the future Heir of The House Of Black marrying the daughter of Eric Lovegood?" His words were greeted in utter silence, then Luna stepped forward and slapped him as hard as she could. He rocked back on his feet, then he gave an evil smirk "So – if there is nothing to it, then why react so badly?" He turned, then walked away. Ginny watched him go, then turned to Harry.

"You can do better, you know" She said, then turned and followed her brother. Harry watched both of them go, then turned back to his friends, only to realise Viktor had walked up behind them.

"Viktor! Well done!"

xoxox

Ginny caught up with her brother as he was walking up the grand staircase. She fell in to step next to him, and they walked in silence for a few moments. When they reached the fifth floor, Ron stopped, then pulled her in to a deserted classroom.

"What?" Ginny said, turning to face him.

"What are you going to do?"

"Pardon me?"

"What are you going to do about Harry?" He stared at her "I know you are going to use this somehow, to break up Harry and Sally"

"So?"

"I want to help" He smiled at her "Whatever you are planning, I want to be a part of" She gazed at him for a moment, then nodded.

"Okay" She sat down on one of the desks "This is what I want to do..."

xoxox

"So Ginny wants to be with Harry?" Viktor asked. The five of them were walking down by the lake, and Hermione was explaining the scene outside the hospital tent.

"Yes" Hermione replied.

"Desperately so" Luna added with a smile.

"Do you think he talked to this Sketa..."

"Skeeter"

"...Skeeter, thank you, woman?"

"I don't know" Harry looked thoughtful "I don't think so - I think she is just taking advantage of whatever crusade Miss Skeeter has decided to pursue"

"Oh" Viktor paused "Is your life always this complicated?"

“Actually – now that you come to mention it, yes” Sally smiled, then continued “But enough about the soap-opera that is our lives – what do you think the egg means?”

xoxox

“You saw where they were sat?”

“Yes”

“And you are not concerned?” There was a pause “I will take that as a yes”

“Even if I am, I can not dictate who his friends are” He gave a self deprecating smile “I have learned that much, at least”

“We could... engineer a reason for the Durmstrang students to be confined to their ship. That would ensure the friendship is short lived”

“I will take it under advisement”

“Very well. Thank you Headmaster”

“Thank you Minerva” Dumbledore watched his deputy leave, then turned and, as his fireplace lit up, smiled “Ah, my old friend. It is good to see you again”

“And you, Headmaster”

“Do you have news?”

“Nothing of consequence at the moment, but I have heard rumours that The Dark Lord intends to get to Potter through one of the boy's friends”

“Indeed?” Dumbledore considered this for a moment “Do you have any details?”

“Not at the minute, but I will look in to it further”

“That would be most helpful”

“I will contact you again next week, if I am able. Goodbye Headmaster”

“Goodbye, Severus”

## Chapter 9

A few weeks later, Dumbledore stood up at the end of the evening meal.

"Before you all return to your common rooms, I would like to make an announcement" He paused, then smiled "As part of The Tri-Wizard Tournament, Hogwarts will be hosting a traditional ball on the last night of school" There was a ripple of surprise through the room, and he waited until it died down "It is open to third years and above, although we have some other activities planned for those in the first two years" He looked around again, then gave a brief smile "In addition, there will be a Hogsmeade trip the weekend before the dance, for those of you who feel they might need something extra to wear" He saw a lot of the girls, and a few of the boys, perk up at that "Thank you"

Harry watched him sit down, then turned to Sally.

"So, Miss Perks, do you have anyone in mind?"

"Why? Are you applying for the position?"

"I thought I might" Harry smiled at his girlfriend "Unless you think you can find someone better" Sally smiled in response, then nodded to her left.

"There is a Tri-Wizard Champion nearby" She said in a teasing tone "Can you compete with that?"

"No" He hung his head mournfully "I can't. But, then again" He smirked "I'm not the one who would be competing" He nodded over to his left "I think if you were to ask young Mr Krum, then young Miss Granger might have something to say about it"

"Darn!" Sally snapped her fingers in resignation "I guess that I am stuck with you then"

"You do realise that you two are crazy, don't you?" A voice came from behind them. They turned to see Luna moving to sit down next to Sally "And coming from me..."

“Yes – we do know that” Harry reached over and took Sally's hand  
“But I, for one, would not have her any other way”

“Me neither” Sally smiled back, then turned to the blonde Ravenclaw  
“So – any ideas about who you might be going with?”

“Who'd want to go with me?” Luna asked in a slightly sad voice.  
Harry and Sally glanced at each other, but before either of them could speak, Luna looked up “Oooh – I think this might be it” They followed her gaze, and saw Viktor walking over to their table.

“Minnie?” Hermione turned to face him.

“Yes Viktor?”

“Would you like to go to the Yule Ball with me?”

“Yes Viktor”

“Thank you”

“See” Luna waved her hands “That's how you do it” Harry turned back to Sally, and smiled.

“Sally?”

“Yes Harry?”

“Would you like to go to the Yule Ball with me?”

“Yes Harry”

“Thank you” They both turned to Luna “So – how's that?”

“Perfect” She beamed, then muttered “Crazy as kites, the pair of them”

xoxox

“Have I told you that I really like being your boyfriend?” Harry asked.  
He and Sally were waiting for Viktor and Hermione to come down so they could go in to Hogsmeade.



"Yes, but don't let that stop you telling me some more" She looked up at him "And not that I mind, but why the sudden declaration?" Harry looked at her, then blushed "Harry?"

"Watching the rest of the school over the last few weeks – since the Ball was announced" He smirked "Being your boyfriend means that very few girls decided to chase The Boy Who Lived for a date"

"Very few?" She arched an eyebrow at him "Do I have some competition?" He swatted her shoulder.

"Nope" He replied "Except for the obvious"

"Ah – The Wacky Slytherin thought that, this being the season of miracles..."

"Something like that" He shrugged "So – where are Viktor and Min..." Before he could finish his sentence, they heard footsteps, and turned to see Viktor and a very-flushed Hermione walking towards them "Min? You okay?"

"She just talked to Ronald Weasley" Viktor said helpfully.

"That explains the annoyance, at least" Sally said with a smirk, then looked back at Hermione "Min – you have to say something eventually" She paused, looking thoughtful "Or you could just gesture and grunt"

"Well – I am thinking of a gesture now" Hermione smirked at her "Sorry – he just really annoyed me"

"What did he do?" Harry asked.

"He called me a girl!"

(flashback)

"Have you been to Hogsmeade before?" Hermione asked as she and Viktor walked towards the entrance hall.

"No" He smiled "Our Headmaster does not approve of us leaving the grounds"

"What about today?" She looked at him worriedly "You will be alright coming with me?"

“Ah yes – sorry” He shook his head “I meant he does not want us wandering around alone, in case we get lost”

“Oh” She gave a small smile “Okay” They continued on for a moment, then stopped when a voice called out from behind them.

“Hermione!” They turned to see Ron running after them.”Wait up!” A few seconds later, he reached them, then skidded to a halt “Can I talk to you?”

“Yes” She faced him “Go on”

“In private” He glanced at Viktor.

“Is it important?”

“Yes”

“Very well” She turned to Viktor “Can you excuse us for a moment? This shouldn't take long”

“Okay” She pulled Ron in to one side.

“What do you want, Ronald?”

“Well – I've been thinking about this ball” He said, pacing back and forth “And I have been wondering who I can ask, and then I thought of you, because you're a girl, right?”

(end flashback)

“It's not that funny!” Hermione was glaring at her friends as both Harry and Sally collapsed in hysterics. After a moment, Sally pulled herself together.

“No. Of course not” She said, then burst out laughing again. Hermione tried to glare at them, but after a moment, she broke down laughing as well.

“So – after he worked out that you were a girl – what did he do then?” Harry asked, still smirking. Hermione went red, and looked at Viktor, who was now smiling as well.

“He took a step back and banged his head on the wall” She said quietly.

"Why?" Sally asked, then her mouth fell open "You didn't?"

"Well – what was I supposed to do" Hermione said defensively "He called me a girl!"

(flashback)

"And I have been wondering who I can ask, and then I thought of you because you're a girl, right?"

Hermione stared at him in disbelief for a moment, then she drew her hand back and slapped him as hard as she could. He rocked back on his feet, and smacked his head against the wall behind him.

"What was..."

"Because you're a girl'?" She yelled "That's why you thought of me?"

"Well yeah" He looked at her, one hand rubbing his cheek "And because you don't have any real friends other than Harry, and he will be taking Perks" She raised her hand again, and had to restrain the urge to smirk as he took an involuntary step back.

"It just so happens someone asked me" She said, lowering her hands "And not just because I'm a girl" She span round on her heel, and took hold of Viktor's hand "Harry and Sally will be waiting" She said, then they both walked off, leaving Ron staring after them.

(end flashback)

"Wow" Harry stared at her with just a hint of admiration "Remind me not to get on your bad side" Hermione gave a small chuckle, then all four of them looked up as Filch walked up to the entrance doors.

"Time to go"

xoxox

A few hours later, while they were all sat around a table in The Three Broomsticks, Sally leaned over to Hermione.

"Do you two want to spend some time alone?" She whispered.

"Maybe" Hermione whispered back "But not because we want rid of you two"

"Oh?"

"There is the whole Christmas present thing" Hermione replied "If this is our last trip out, then..."

"Oh yeah" Sally nodded "That hadn't occurred to me"

"So – after we leave here..." Hermione trailed off when she saw Luna coming towards them, holding a newspaper "Well – this can't be good"

"What makes you say that?" Sally asked with a smirk, then they fell silent as Luna sat down next to Hermione. She put the paper down in the middle of the table, and they all stared at the headline, then turned to Luna.

"Everyone knows" She sighed "While I was walking here, I saw five, six groups of students talking about it"

"Should we go and talk to him?" Harry asked "I mean – he probably isn't taking this well" He looked around the pub, and saw a few of the Slytherin groups laughing over the papers they were reading "Do you think it is going to be used against him?"

"It's possible" Sally looked around, then turned to Viktor "Do you want to come with us?"

"This Hagrid" He gestured at the paper "He is your friend?"

"Yes" Luna and Hermione said together.

"Is this true?" He gestured at the paper again.

"Yes" Luna nodded.

"Do you care?"

"No"

"Then you should tell him that" He stood up "I will come with you"

xoxox

"Yuv 'eard?" Hagrid let them in to his cabin "Dumbledore's already bin down and spoke ta me" He gave a big sniff "Said I could keep ma job as long as I wanted"

"That's good" Sally smiled, then her smile faded "Do you know how she might have found out?"

"No" He shook his head mournfully "I 'aven't told anyone, and Dumbledore said ma records were private" He looked around at them "I don't know 'ow she coulda found out"

xoxox

They stayed for another half hour, then, with a few comforting words, they returned to the castle and went back to their own common rooms.

"So – what do you think?" Hermione asked "Someone spoke to them?"

"I really don't know" Harry sighed "I guess we could keep a look out – just in case she is wandering about"

xoxox

"Wow" Harry stared up the stairs to the girls' dorms. It was the night of the Yule Ball, and he, and a few other of the male Gryffindor students, were waiting for their dates. And now, it seemed, their dates were ready to meet them.

"I will take that as a compliment" Hermione said, smiling down at him.

"You look amazing" Harry said, taking her hand and escorting her down the last few steps "I mean... not that..."

"Don't worry" Hermione gave him another smile "I understand what you mean, and thank you" She gave a quick twirl, then moved to one side "I am meeting Viktor in the Entrance Hall – The Champions have to lead the first dance..."

"Every day I am more and more glad that I am not one of those Champions" She smiled at him, then looked at something behind him. He turned, and saw Ginny come down the stairs. The young girl glanced at Harry, then walked over to where Neville was waiting for

her. A moment later, they walked past him, and out of the Common Room.

"Well – that went well" He said "At least she didn't kick me" Hermione grinned at him, then he turned back and his mouth fell open in surprise.

"You didn't do that for me" Hermione said, but with a smirk in her voice. Harry barely noticed, as Sally descended the stairs.

"You look..." He trailed off, trying to find a word that would do the vision in front of him justice.

"Radiant? Glowing? A vision of heavenly beauty?" Sally asked with a smirk "Feel free to supply your own adjectives"

"I would, but you seem to have taken all my words" He gave a small bow "So I will stick with yours, if you don't mind"

"Well – it does make me doubt your fitness as a boyfriend, but I will let it slide for tonight" She took his hand and walked over to Hermione "Was he this eloquent with you?"

"He said I was amazing" Hermione said with a smirk. Sally turned and glared at her boyfriend.

"You managed to call Minnie 'amazing', and yet you couldn't come up with something for me?" She said in a light tone "This does not bode well for your future, Mr Potter" Harry smiled sheepishly.

"Don't worry, Miss Perks, I will make it up to you" He took her hand, and glanced at Hermione "Shall we go?"

xoxox

"Min? Do you want to go on ahead?" Sally looked at Hermione. She smiled, and nodded, then walked off down the corridor. Harry turned to Sally.

"Am I missing something?"

"We are taking a little detour" She smiled back at him, then lead him off down a side corridor. For a few minutes, he had no idea where she was taking him, then, suddenly, it clicked in to focus.

“You know we can't get in – not without a password”

“Trust me”

They arrived at the entrance to Ravenclaw Tower a few minutes later.

“So – what now?” Harry asked. Sally gave him a smile, then turned rapped the eagle shaped door knocker against the door. A moment later, the door opened “Do I even want to know how you did that?”

“I just figured that if I could get in to The Chamber of Secrets, I could probably get in to anywhere in the school” She gave a chuckle at the expression on his face “Come on – we have a job to do” She walked in to the common room, then up the stairs, gesturing for Harry to sit down.

xoxox

“Luna” Sally pushed the door to the third-year dormitory open “Are you in here?”

“Sally?” Luna sat up and turned to her “How did you get in here?”

“I will explain later” She said “Do you have something to wear?”

“Wear?”

“To the Ball?”

“Ball?”

“Yes – you are going to the Ball, and you need something to wear” Luna stared at her in surprise “This will go a lot quicker if you just accept what I say”

“Okay” Luna smiled, then bounced to her feet.

xoxox

“Harry? What are you doing here?” Harry turned as Terry Boot came in to the common room.

“Would you believe me if I said I had no idea?”

“How did you get in?”

“Sally let me in”

“And how did Sally get in?”

“I really don't know” Harry stood up “If it helps, I don't think we are here to cause problems, or prank your house in any way”

“Okay” Terry looked around “So – what do you think of the room?”

xoxox

“Are you ready?” Luna asked.

“Lets see it” Sally turned, and watched as Luna came out of the bathroom “Wow”

“Really?”

“Yup” She smiled “You look amazing”

“Thank you” Luna beamed at the praise “I suppose we should go?”

“Indeed” She opened the door, and ushered Luna through.

xoxox

“I think Hermione would love it here” Harry said “I mean - I like Gryffindor Tower, but sometimes it gets far too noisy for doing homework and studying”

“I can understand...” Terry trailed off, staring up the stairs. Harry turned to follow his gaze, and smiled.

“So you approve?” Sally said, walking down behind Luna.

“If I say yes, are you going to yell at me?”

“I will take that as a yes then” She smiled at Terry “Mr Boot”

“Luna – you look... amazing”

“Thank you Terry” Luna replied, then turned to Sally “We should be going, otherwise we will miss the Ball completely”



xoxox

"There you are" Hermione and Viktor turned as the other three walked up to them "I am glad you decided to come, Luna"

"I wasn't given much of a choice" She smiled "Sally was most insistent"

"You should go in" Hermione said, taking Viktor's hand "Professor McGonagall said we would be starting the first dance in about five minutes"

"Okay" Harry replied, then held out both his arms "Ladies? May I escort you in?"

xoxox

"I don't think she has a date" Ron was stood next to Parvati "Who would take her?"

"I don't care" Parvati stared at him, wondering why she had agreed to go with him. On the other side of the hall, her sister was stood hand in hand with Michael Corner, and appeared to be having a good time.

"I mean – she barely has any friends, and Potter isn't going to take her" He stared as the doors opened "Not when he is taking..."

"Lovegood and Perks?" Parvati gasped "Do you think Skeeter was right?"

"I don't know" Ron looked over to where Ginny was stood with Neville, and gave her a small smile. She smiled back, but then turned a look of fury on Harry and the two girls "But I am sure we will find out tomorrow"

"Oh my" Ron turned to his date.

"What?" She didn't reply – instead she pointed across the hall. Ron turned to see Hermione Granger walking in, hand in hand with...

"VIKTOR KRUM?"

xoxox

The next morning, breakfast was served late. Harry and Sally wandered down, and found Luna sat at the end of the Ravenclaw table.

“Good morning, Luna”

“Good morning” She frowned up at them.

“Something wrong?” Sally sat down at the table “From last night?”

“No – not exactly” She reached over and pulled back a paper “This came this morning” Sally took it, then started to read.

“Last night, The Heir to The House Of Potter was seen dancing with the daughter of Quibbler publisher Eric Lovegood at The Tri-Wizard Ball. Reports say he entered the hall with Miss Luna Lovegood, and his stated girlfriend Miss Sally-Ann Perks” She dropped the paper, and turned to face Harry “Well – this is fun”

“Don't worry about it” He turned to Luna “Luna?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“Don't you worry about it either”

“I seldom do” She smiled back, then bounced to her feet as Hermione came in to the hall “I'll be back in a mo” Harry and Sally watched her go.

“Is that why you invited her?” Harry asked, turning to Sally.

“Partly, yeah” Sally sighed “But be honest – you had fun with her, didn't you?”

“Yup” He smiled “She's coming over for Christmas?”

“Yeah – and I asked my mother if we could invite Viktor too”

“Did you inform Hermione of this?” Harry smirked, then chuckled when Sally shook her head.

“I thought it might be a nice surprise for her”

“You are all heart”

“And don't forget it”

## Chapter 10

"A nice reliant 2001?"

"Okay"

"And not a bound house-elf"

"Cause that's cruel?"

"So – what are we missing?"

"Someone's remains and no, Sally, before you ask, we can't have Lord Voldemort's"

"Oh phooey"

"But we are going with a Mirror Of Erised?"

"Of course" There was a long pause "Do you think we will ever get this finished?"

"Maybe" Another pause "Okay, probably not"

"So why are we bothering?"

"Teaches us to work as a group?"

"We are really bored?"

"That's probably it"

"Guys!" The three looked up from around the table to see Sirius coming in to the living room "What are you doing, stuck in doors on a day like this?"

"That's what I asked" Hermione said "But Sally and Harry said we had to do this instead" She gestured at the pieces of paper in front of them. Sirius turned to his niece and nephew.

"So?" Harry and Sally glanced at each other, then Harry shrugged.

"Okay - I give in" He turned to his girlfriend "Sal – could you take Minnie upstairs and get your coats?"

"Why yes, Harry, I can" She smirked at him, then she and Hermione – who was looking more puzzled than ever – left the room. Once Harry was sure they were out of earshot, he turned back to Sirius, who was staring at him as if he was crazy.

"Are you feeling well?" His uncle asked him "Because you seem to be a little... off today"

"I am perfectly fine, Uncle of mine" Harry beamed, then turned as the fire-place burst in to life "I just wanted to get rid of Minnie before her guest arrived" As he finished speaking, Viktor stepped out of the fire, followed by Susan "Viktor – you made it"

"I would not miss this for the world" The Bulgarian Champion smiled back at them "Is she upstairs?"

"She and Sal should be back in a moment" Sirius said with a smile, then he turned to Harry "You are definitely your father's son you know"

"I do know that" He turned to Susan "Thank you"

"It's not a problem" Susan smiled back "And I thought if you four were going to go for a walk, the least I could do is keep Mike company"

"Oh yes?" Harry raised his eyebrows "Something I should know?"

"What?" She looked at him, then blushed "Harry! No!" She looked over at Sirius, who was equally red "Mike – tell him"

"We are just going to sort out some presents and so on" Sirius said, still blushing "So don't go getting any ideas"

"Yes, dad" Harry smirked, then turned back to Viktor "So – did you have any problems getting here?"

"No, thank you" Viktor replied "The Headmaster – my Headmaster – was happy to let me come, as long as I went by the floo" He shrugged "I think he is worried about us getting lost"

"I can understand that" Sirius said "Once, when Harry was seven, he went out with Hermione for a walk and..."

"Please!" Harry yelled, putting his hand over Sirius' mouth "I don't think Viktor needs to know about that!" He turned to Viktor "Would you like to go and find the girls now?"

"Okay" Viktor looked a tad mystified, but followed Harry out of the room, leaving Sirius with a smile on his face.

"So – what did happen that Harry doesn't want us to know?" Susan asked.

"It's a long story, but I think we have time" Sirius glanced at the door, then continued "It's like this..."

xoxox

"Have you found it yet?" Hermione's voice came out of Sally's room as the two boys approached it.

"I am sure it is here somewhere" Sally replied.

"And you have to give me this hat?"

"Yes – you will look adorable in it" Sally said, then caught sight of Harry through the door. A moment later, she opened a draw "Ah – here it is" She pulled out a little woolen hat, and passed it to Hermione.

"You want me to try this on? Seriously?"

"Trust me"

"Okay" There was a pause, then "So – what do you think?" Harry gestured to Viktor, who walked in to the room.

"I think it looks very nice" He said, causing Hermione to spin round in surprise.

"VIKTOR!"

xoxox

Ten minutes later, the four of them were walking through a snow filled park.

“So – what do you think of Britain so far?” Hermione asked. She had been holding Viktor's hand since they set off, and had no intention of letting it go any time soon.

“It is very nice” He replied “Of course, there are parts that are nicer than others” He smiled as she blushed, and looked down at the ground. Harry and Sally, who were watching from a discrete distance, smiled as well, and exchanged high-fives.

“Do they know how cute they are together?” Sally asked.

“Did we?” Harry replied, putting his arm around her shoulders.

“Probably not” She smiled, then looked down at the snow “You know – a less charitable person than I might be tempted to put all this snow to some nefarious purpose” She glanced up at Harry, who smiled back. They both bent down, made a snowball, and then started to creep up behind the unsuspecting couple in front of them.

Just as they reached their target, the two students in front of them span around, both holding up snow balls of their own.

“Don't even try it, Potter” Hermione said “You were never any good at this” Harry glanced at the snowballs, then at Sally, then back at the snowballs.

“Maybe you are right” He shrugged, then he threw the ball forward, and hit Hermione on the chest “But that was a long time ago! Now I have power you can't... urk!!” His tirade was cut off as Hermione's snow ball hit him in the shoulder “You know that this means war?”

“Of course!”

xoxox

“What happened to you four?” Sirius and Susan had been wrapping presents in the front room when they had caught side of the returning kids in the window. They stood up, and walked up to the door, just in time to see the children coming in.

“What do you mean?” Harry asked, trying to sound innocent.

“What do you mean, what do we mean?” Sirius stared at them. All four of them were soaking wet, and both Sally and Hermione's hair was full of white flakes of snow.

“There was a slight... snowball war”

“A snowball war?” Susan giggled “You don't do things by half, do you?”

“Well – they started it” Harry and Hermione said, pointing at each other. They paused, then both gave a laugh.

“Never mind” Sirius shook his head “You can all go upstairs and get dry, then you need to sort yourselves out for your own presents”

“Okay” The four kids bounded off upstairs, and Sirius turned back to Susan.

“What I want to know is why didn't they invite us?”

xoxox

Later that night, after Viktor had returned to Hogwarts, and Hermione had returned home, Sally and Harry sat in front of the fire.

“Did you have fun today, dear?” Harry asked. Sally was laid down, with her head in his lap, and he absently stroked her hair as they both watched the flames dance in the fireplace.

“Yes” She replied “You?”

“Oh yes” He smiled down at her fondly “It's strange”

“What?”

“I spend nearly every waking hour with you at school, but somehow it doesn't seem the same as spending time with you here” He paused “And I miss Uncle Mike a lot when I am away”

“I know what you mean” Sally closed her eyes and gave a brief shiver as his hands stroked the back of her neck “I know we can come back and see them whenever we want, but somehow it's not the same” They sat in silence for a moment “Harry?”

“Yes love?”

“What are we going to do about Luna?”



"I don't know" He stared in to the fire "I mean, what can we do? She's obviously happy with him"

"I know" Sally sighed "It would be much easier if he wasn't so likable" She giggled "Even Luna likes him, which, I admit, is very like her"

"I don't suppose you'd know if there is... anyone else she might be interested in?" Sally looked up at him, amused.

"Because I am more likely to know than you?" She giggled again "Do you think that's all we talk about?"

"I don't know" He replied, smiling back "But I know it's not what we talk about"

"Really?" She sat up and turned to him "Guys don't talk about girls?"

"No – we do" He said "Well, not me obviously, but the others do talk about girls"

"So?"

"They talk about girls that like them, or that they like" He said.

"Oh" She nodded "I guess that makes sense" She stared at the fire for a few moments "The thing is..."

"Yeah?"

"I don't think that Luna likes Min because Min's a girl"

"Which given Minnie's reaction to Ron saying that is probably a good thing" Sally smirked.

"True. But I think she likes her because she is who she is" She looked at Harry "Does Minnie know?"

"I don't think so" Harry looked at her questioningly "You aren't going to tell her, are you?"

"God no" Sally shook her head "Kinda sucks, doesn't it?"

"Maybe a little" Harry said "But if Vanessa is right, it will be the least of our problems" He smiled "So I guess there is an upside to Voldemort's return"

"See – that's what I like about you" Sally beamed "You can always find a positive side to everything" Harry leaned over and kissed her, then looked down at his watch.

"It's late"

"I know" She pushed him back in his seat, then lay down again.

"Okay"

xoxox

"JOY TO THE WORLD!" Sirius bounced down the stairs, singing at the top of his voice "THE DAY HAS COME! TODAY, WE GET, OUR GIFTS" He bounded in to the lounge, then skidded to a halt. He stared down at the couch for a few moments, then crept over to the fireplace, and opened up a connection to Sally's house "Susan? Are you there?"

"Good morning, Sirius, and Merry Christmas"

"Merry Christmas to you too" Sirius looked over his shoulder, then turned back to Susan "Did Sally say anything about staying over last night?"

"No, but we did leave it a little open" She frowned "Why?"

"Can you come through?" He asked, then stood aside, and a moment later appeared in the living room. She stared over at the couch, and her face split in to a smile.

"So – what are we going to do?" She asked.

"Well – Harry looks like he is about to wake up, so I say we sit down, and watch the show" Sirius grinned, then he got a mischievous look in his eyes "Unless you think we should invite Hermione and her parents over first?"

"You are an evil, evil man" Susan smiled, then turned back to the fire "Can we get the Grangers on this?"

xoxox

Harry opened his eyes, then closed them again.

"This can't be happening" He thought "I can't have spent the whole night with Sally, on the sofa, only to be woken up by my dad, her mum and everyone else" He half-opened one eye and looked around the room "Actually – it appears I can. At least it can't get any worse" He felt Sally stir in his arms, and realised she was about to wake up "Why do I think these things?"

"Mmmm" Sally stretched, and turned to Harry "Morning"

"Sally..."

"Happy Christmas honey"

"Sally!"

"What?" He pointed over her shoulder, and she slowly turned her head to follow the direction he pointed. She turned back a moment later and sighed "Oh dear"

xoxox

Half an hour, and what Harry and Sally considered an excessive amount of teasing, later, the two escaped upstairs to his room.

"Well – that was fun" He flopped down on his bed, then smiled "But I wouldn't have changed it"

"Me neither" She smiled back, and sat down next to him "You know if we stay up here for too long, they will assume that we are doing something we shouldn't be" His smiled widened.

"So – how long do you think we can wait for their paranoia to kick in?"

xoxox

"Luna! Merry Christmas!"

"And to you" She and her father came in to the room "And thank you for inviting us to lunch"

"Thank you for coming" Harry turned "Viktor arrived a little while ago, and he and Hermione are in the back garden. Would you like to come with us, and leave the adults to talk?" Harry stared at her intently, so Luna nodded, and turned to her father.

"May I?"

"Of course. I will go and find Mike and Susan" Eric smiled at her "Have fun" She watched him as he walked off, then turned back to Harry.

"Shall we go?"

xoxox

"Viktor – we invited you here for a reason other than celebrating Christmas" Sally said, glancing at the others.

"You do not wish to celebrate Christmas?" Viktor asked in surprise.

"No!" Sally yelled "I mean – yes, we do want to celebrate Christmas"

"Oh" He stared at them in confusion, causing Luna to give a little giggle.

"Sally - I think you should take pity on our friend, and tell him why he is here"

"Of course" Sally took a deep breath, then turned back to Viktor "We are here to celebrate Christmas, but we also want to talk to you about something else – something that doesn't have anything to do with Christmas"

"Oh" Viktor smiled "What did you want to talk to me about?"

"We believe that Voldemort is going to come back when the Tournament ends, and we plan to fight him, and to stop him if at all possible" She stared at him "All of us here – including our parents and friends – are a part of this, and we would like you to be a part of it too" Viktor stared at her for a long while.

"Why do you think he is coming back?" He asked.

"We have other allies that are not here, that we will tell you about later. One of them has predicted the future every year for the past

four years, and for the past three it has been correct, and this year..." She trailed off "We don't know how, and we don't know why, but we are sure that, once the final task is complete, Voldemort will return, and we will have to fight him"

"Why do you want my help?"

"Because you are Hermione's friend, and she trusts you" Harry said with a smile, then laughed at the expression on his face "We don't have any expectations as to what you can do, but we trust you, and we don't want to leave you out of this"

"Oh" Viktor was silent for a few moments, then nodded "Okay. I will help you if I can" He paused for a moment, then seemed to come to a decision "I think I can tell you something about my Headmaster"

"Karkaroff?" Hermione asked.

"Yes" Viktor paused, then took a deep breath "He used to be a Death Eater"

xoxox

"So how did it go?" Sirius and Harry were talking in the front room, waiting for their last guest to arrive.

"Pretty good" Harry replied, glancing at the fireplace "The information he told us about Karkaroff might prove useful, but even if it doesn't, I think he will be a good addition"

"And you don't think he will tell?"

"No" Harry smiled "Quite aside from the fact he took the same oath that the others did, he doesn't like Death Eaters or Voldemort, and wants to be a part of fighting them" He saw Sirius staring at him "What?"

"He isn't being too helpful, is he?"

"What?" Harry paused, then shook his head "No – he isn't. I think he is on the level" He saw the skeptical look on his uncle's face "Don't ask me how, I just... know"

"Okay" They both turned as the fireplace flared in to life. A moment later, a man stepped out of it. As he dusted himself off, Sirius

stepped forward and held out his hand “Minister Fudge – thank you for coming”

## Chapter 11

"So he figured it out then?" Harry, Sally and Hermione were in Gryffindor Tower, on the night before the second task.

"We figure it out, if you don't mind" Hermione glared at Harry "But yes – we figured it out last night, after raiding the restricted section for a book on analysing charms" There was a pause, then Sally burst out laughing.

"You found out the spells cast on the egg?" She asked in disbelief.

"It seemed to be the best way" Hermione smiled back "I mean – we could have worked it out by deduction, but why bother when we can cheat?"

"So what did you find out?"

*"Come seek us where our voices sound,  
We cannot sing above the ground,  
And while you're searching, ponder this:  
We've taken what you'll sorely miss,*

*An hour long you'll have to look,  
And to recover what we took.  
But past an hour - the prospect's black  
Too late, it's gone, it won't come back"*

"And that means what?" Harry asked.

"Aside from the obvious?" Hermione asked "We're not sure. Our best guess is something to do with the lake – possibly the merepeople that live there"

"They will take something that Viktor has to get back?"

"Yup" She smiled "It doesn't help a lot, but forewarned, as they say is..." She trailed off as Profess McGonagall came in to the common room.

"Miss Granger – the Headmaster would like to see you in his office"

"Professor?"

“What part of that was unclear, Miss Granger?”

“Doesn't he want to see Harry Professor?” She glanced at her friend.

“No, Miss Granger, he doesn't. If he did, I would have said so” She turned and started to walk away “Are you coming, Miss Granger, or will I have to tell the Headmaster you had better things to do?”

“Sorry, Professor” She stood up “Don't wait up guys, I will see you tomorrow” She smiled, then turned to follow McGonagall. The other two watched her go, then stood up.

“Sleep well, love” Harry kissed her cheek, then they both went upstairs.

xoxox

“Harry”

“Mrgh!”

“Harry!”

“Mrgh!”

“Aguamenti!” Water shot out of Sally's wand and squirted in to Harry's face. He sat bolt upright, pulling his wand out from under his pillow “Wow – that's pretty impressive”

“Thank you” He shook his head, spraying water around the room  
“What's up?”

“Min's missing”

xoxox

“She didn't come back last night – her bed hasn't been slept in” The two of them were walking down the corridor to the Headmaster's office.

“Did she come back at all?” Harry looked at his girlfriend “Did she return, then leave again?”



"I don't know" She shrugged apologetically "I fell asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow"

"No change of clothes?"

"I really don't know" She sighed "I'm sorry - I don't know where she is, and I am worried"

"So am I" He looked up "We're here" They stared at the gargoyle outside the Headmaster's office for a moment, then Harry shrugged "Hey – can you let us in? It's an emergency" For a moment, nothing happened, then the door slid aside, and they stepped on to the moving staircase.

xoxox

"Enter" Dumbledore turned as the door to his office opened "Miss Perks, Mr Potter – this is a surprise. I thought you would be getting ready to cheer Mr Krum on"

"Hermione Granger is missing, sir, and we thought you should know" Sally said.

"I would not worry about her, Miss Perks. I am sure she is alright"

"Sir?"

"Miss Granger is perfectly safe, so you should go down and support your friend"

"Where is she sir?" Harry asked "And how do you know she is safe?"

"I don't suppose you will just take my word for it?" He looked at the expressions on their faces "Very well. I will tell you, but this can't go any further" He smiled "I wouldn't want to be accused of cheating"

"Okay"

"Last night, we put Miss Granger in to a deep sleep, and then tied her up at the bottom of the lake"

"Pardon me?"

"I take it Miss Granger told you the poem?" He saw understanding come in to their eyes.

"She's the thing that Viktor has to find?"

"Yes. Along with Fleur's sister, and Cho Chang"

"For Fleur and Cedric?"

"Yes"

"And they will be safe?"

"Perfectly safe. The merepeople have promised they will look after them"

"And if Fleur, Viktor and Ced don't get to them?" Harry asked "Will they be okay after an hour has passed?"

"Yes – they will be safe for two hours, and if they haven't been rescued by then, they will be returned to shore automatically" He looked at them "I promise you they are all perfectly safe" They stared at him for a moment, then turned and started moving their hands. He guessed they were communicating in some way, but for the life of him he couldn't work out what they were saying. A few moments later, they turned back to him.

"Very well. We will go and cheer on Viktor. We won't tell him about Hermione, nor will we tell the others" Sally smiled, then her smile faded "But if they aren't back in two hours, we will go and get them"

"You are so sure you can find them?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes sir" Sally replied "We are" They both turned to leave, but when they reached the door, they stopped, and Sally turned back "Sir?"

"Yes Miss Perks?"

"Do Claire and Arnold know where their daughter is?" The look on his face answered her question "Somehow I didn't think so"

xoxox

"Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls – welcome to The Second Task of The Tri-Wizard Tournament" Fudge's voice echoed across

the lake "This morning, something precious was taken from each of the Champions, and they now have an hour to get it back. The score for this will be based on time taken, and the method used to retrieve their target" He looked over, and Dumbledore nodded "So now – Champions, take your positions"

"Are you sure she is okay?" Viktor asked. He had noticed Hermione was missing, but Karkaroff had insisted he take his place with Cedric and Fleur. Harry and Sally had gone with him, as all the Champions were allowed people with them for support.

"She is fine" Sally smiled "Just concentrate on the task, and you can see her later" Viktor gazed at her for a moment, then smiled.

"Okay" He turned back to face the lake.

"The Champions are all prepared" Fudge said "So, on my mark. Three. Two. One. GO!"

The three Champions dived off the starting platform, and almost at once Viktor transformed in to a shark.

"He's an animagus?" Harry asked.

"I guess so" Sally responded.

"Well – at least he should be okay" Harry smiled "I can't imagine that anything in the lake would dare to challenge a great white" He looked around "Do you think we could conjure some chairs?"

xoxox

"How long has it been?" Sally asked. The two of them had been sat on the starting platform since the Champions had entered the water, and it seemed like it had been forever.

"About half an hour" Harry replied, showing her his watch "But, depending how deep they are, it might take most of the hour, so I wouldn't start worrying yet"

"Really?" She turned "You aren't worried?"

"Do you really think that, once he finds out what his target is, he will let anything happen to her?" Harry smiled "I would say we have..." His words were interrupted by a noise, and they both turned to see

Fleur surfacing in the lake. She looked around wildly, then swam towards the platform.

“Surprisingly, that makes me feel a bit better” Sally smiled as Fleur pulled herself out of the water “As manipulative and conniving as Dumbledore might be, he is not going to let an eight year old girl drown just because her sister couldn't save her”

“True” They both watched Fleur run over to Madam Maxine “She seems somewhat agitated for someone who supposedly doesn't know what she was trying to find, doesn't she?”

“Just a little, yeah” Harry glanced over to where Dumbledore was stood, watching the surface of the lake “Do you think he told Cedric?”

“And be accused of cheating?”

“Good point”

xoxox

Ten minute later, they leaped to their feet as two figures surfaced.

“And CEDRIC DIGGORY returns, along with Miss Chang” Fudge called out, and most of the platforms broke in to cheers.

“Twenty minutes” Harry said, taking Sally's hand as they sat down again “I am sure they will be okay”

“Me too” Sally said in a less than convincing voice “But even if they make it back now, Viktor will be in second place”

“Not third?” Harry asked.

“Fleur didn't rescue her sister, so I think she will either end up in third, or possibly...”

“Disqualification?”

“I don't know what happens if you don't finish a task” She glanced over to where the French contingent was gathered round their Champion “Maybe nothing, if you attempt it”

"I guess we will find out after the hour is up" He paused, staring down at the water "Sally?"

"Yes Harry?"

"How would we find them, if they don't return?"

"I don't really know" She shrugged "I am not sure how well projection works under water, and I am pretty sure we would be noticed if we tried"

"We could ask Luna to cause a distraction" Harry smirked "I think she would agree that she could be good at that"

"True" Sally giggled "But lets not put the carriage before the thestral" She scanned the water, then suddenly stood up "Because I think we won't be needing either" She pointed out across the surface of the lake, and a moment later, a large fin broke through the waves. She stared for a moment, then started laughing.

"What?"

"I don't suppose you know how to create music? That would fill the area?"

"Sorry" He watched her as she continued to laugh "Why?"

"Oh – no reason" They both turned back to the lake as the fin started to grow smaller, and then vanished as both Viktor and Hermione's head appeared. Harry and Sally started cheering, along with the other students from Durmstrang.

"And VIKTOR KRUM returns with Miss Granger, in a time of 45 minutes" Fudge called out "And with that, The Second Task is complete"

There was a bright flash of light, and when it faded, a young girl in a one-piece swimming costume was stood on the platform, looking around in surprise.

"GABRIELLE!" Fleur yelled out, then, shrugging off the towel, and her school-mates, she ran to her little sister, and hugged her.

"I guess he was telling the truth then" Harry smirked, then they both leaned over and helped pull Viktor and Hermione out of the water.

Karkaroff brought over a towel for Viktor, but he gave it to Hermione. She was shivering slightly, but smiling at her boyfriend.

"How are you?" He asked.

"I am fine" She smiled "Thank you for coming to rescue me" She turned to Sally and Harry "I take it you knew?"

"Not until this morning" Harry said, shrugging apologetically "When we confronted Dumbledore, he told us, but made us promise not to tell anyone else" He turned to Viktor "Sorry – but we didn't want to get you in to trouble by cheating"

"I understand" He replied, then he turned back to Hermione "Are you sure you are alright?"

"Yes – honestly – I am okay" She replied, drying herself off "I was asleep until you brought me back to the surface, and I really don't remember anything since I went to see Dumbledore last night"

"Good" He hugged her "I am sorry to put you through this"

"I think it's kind of nice" She smiled at him "Apparently this means you will miss me the most" She gave him a quick peck on the cheek, then quietened down as Fudge's voice sounded again.

"The Judges have conferred, and the scores are as follows" He paused "Miss Delacour, although she did not complete the task, did show ingenuity with her use of gillyweed. She is awarded 22 points" There was a smattering of applause, but no one was really surprised.

"Mr Krum, using his abilities as an animagus, returned the second fastest, and so is awarded 36 points" The applause was louder this time, along with some cheers from the Durmstrang students.

"And finally, Mr Diggory returned in the fastest time, and showed good use of the bubble-head charm. And so he receives 38 points" The cheering was explosive, as the Hogwarts' students realised that their Champion was now in the lead.

"The Third and Final task will take place near the end of the year. No doubt the Champions will be pleased to know there is no puzzle to solve for this, but the current rankings will play a part in the

completion of the next task” He paused “Thank you all for coming, and have a safe journey home”

xoxox

“Good morning Viktor” Hermione sat down next to her boyfriend in the Great Hall “Do you have any plans for today?”

“No” Viktor replied “I was going to rest after yesterday” He looked her up and down “Are you alright?”

“I am fine” She smiled “Madam Pomfrey checked me out, and she says I am perfectly fit and well”

“Good” He smiled back “So – what would you like to do today?”

“We – Sally, Harry and I – were wondering if you would like to come to Hogsmeade with us. They want to buy us lunch, to celebrate your success”

“I did not win” He sighed.

“But you did rescue me”

“You would have been returned, like Fleur's sister”

“But you did rescue me” She slapped him lightly on the arm “Just say yes – it will make life easier”

“Yes, I will come with you”

“Thank you”

xoxox

“Harry?”

“Yes Min?”

“Did you notice the two people following us?”

“Yes Min”

“Oh. Good”

"I am pretty sure that one of them is Professor Moody" He glanced round, pretending to look in a shop window "The other one, I am not so sure about"

"It's a woman with purple hair" Sally said from behind them. She and Viktor had been discussing the merits of various Quidditch teams, but had been keeping an eye on their surroundings as well "Or at least it is at the moment. I think she keeps changing it"

"Should we talk to them?"

"Nah" Hermione smirked "If they want to follow us around, I say we let them. Moody is probably here on Dumbledore's orders, so they probably won't hurt us" She looked in to the same window as Harry, then gave another smirk "How much do you think we can annoy them before they give up and go away?"

"I don't know" He replied with a wolfish grin "But it might be fun to find out"

xoxox

"I think they are on to us, Mad-Eye"

"What makes you think that?"

"You came to Hogsmeade when you were a student here, didn't you?"

"Course I did – quite a few times actually"

"And, in your many trips here, did you ever go to a shop at the far end, then all the way back here, then all the way back there to visit the shop next to the shop you went in to first?" There was a long paused.

"Okay Nymphadora, you may have a point" Moody sighed "Should've know – they have been the most impressive in their class all year"

"Should we go and talk to them now?" Tonks looked at him hopefully "Or are we going to keep pretending that we don't know we've been rumbled?"



"You can talk to us" Hermione called out "We are quite curious as to what you are doing" Moody turned to Tonks and nodded. They both threw back their hoods, and marched over to the kids "Would you like to join us for a drink?" Hermione smiled sweetly "I mean – after all we put you through, it is the least we can do"

"That's nice of you" Tonks said "I'm Tonks, by the way"

"Just Tonks?" Sally asked curiously.

"Yes" She replied firmly "I have no first name at all" She glared at Moody, as if daring him to contradict him.

"It's true" Moody said, then gave a slight smile "She lost her first name in a Hippogriff attack two years ago" The four students stared at him in surprise, then they started laughing.

"Professor Moody – I didn't know you had a sense of humour"

"Well – if we can go for that drink, I am sure you will find out a lot more about me"

xoxox

"So what tipped you off?" The six of them had been in The Three Broomsticks for an hour or so, and Moody and Tonks had been regaling them with tales of their times at Hogwarts.

"I am afraid it was your limp, sir" Hermione said "After the first few times we saw you, it was easy to tell that you were following us" She turned to Tonks "You were harder to spot, and confused us at first, but once we were sure that the man was Professor Moody, we decided that you must be the same person, even if you looked different..." She trailed off, and her mouth fell open "A metamorphagus?" Tonks smiled, and Moody clapped her on the back.

"I told you she was smart" The professor beamed.

"Wow" Sally stared at Tonks "I have never met a metamorphagus before"

"It's a genetic talent, rather than one that can be learned" Tonks replied, then morphed herself in to a copy of Sally "And it comes in handy sometimes"

"I'll bet" Sally glanced at Harry "Can you tell the difference?"

"Of course" Harry said with certainty.

"Really?" Tonks asked with interest "What did I get wrong?"

"Two things" Harry said, taking Sally's hand "The first is obvious – you don't smell like Sally"

"Pardon me?" His girlfriend turned to glare at him.

"Your perfume" Hermione said quickly "Tonks is wearing a different brand than you"

"Oh" Sally replied, slightly mollified "What else?"

"Your eyes" He reached up to touch her cheek "I look in to her eyes, and just see a woman. I look in to yours, and I see the future" Sally smiled at him, then leaned over and kissed him thoroughly. The other four watched for a moment, then Hermione gave a cough. The two lovers turned to stare at her, both blushing madly.

"Sorry – bug in my throat" She said, not trying to hide her laughter.

"Yes – well" Harry turned to the two adults "If you don't mind, why were you following us?" Moody looked around, then pulled out his wand, and cast a silence spell.

"Professor Dumbledore received some information – he believes that Voldemort is going to come at you through one of your friends" He glanced at Viktor "Since Mr Krum is one of your newer friends, we wanted to make sure that he wasn't the one" Hermione opened her mouth to reply, but Viktor put his hand on her shoulder.

"I understand" He said seriously "My school has a reputation for being dark, and as my Headmaster was one of Voldemort's Death Eaters, I would be a natural suspect"

"Yes" Tonks said "But from what we have seen today, you care a lot for Hermione, and are friends with these two" She gestured to Harry and Sally.

"Yes – I would not hurt them" He said. There was a moment's silence, then Tonks looked at her watch.

“Well – we should be going” She stood up, and Moody followed  
“Thank you for buying us a drink, and for being so understanding”

“Thank you for being such good company” Sally replied with a smile  
“Maybe we will see you next time we are here” The two adults  
nodded, then turned and walked out of the pub.

“I suppose we should be getting back to?” Sally asked.

“I suppose we should” Harry smiled, and offered her his arm. A  
moment later, Viktor had done the same to Hermione, and, arm in  
arm, the two couples walked out of the pub.

## Chapter 12

“And... we're done”

“Really?”

“Yup” Hermione smiled at the other three “All the lyrics are there and accounted for, and, even though I do say so myself, it is pretty good”

“It is” He stared at it “Are you sure about the basilisk part?” He looked over at the other two “You don't think it is too... recent?” Luna shook her head.

“It'll be fine” She smiled “Besides – the only people I can really imagine getting annoyed are...” She glanced to the far corner of the common room, where there seemed to be a complete gathering of the Hogwarts' Weasleys “And do you really care what they think?” She saw the other three smirk “That's what I thought” She looked at her watch “I'm sorry guys – I've got to be going” She stood up, then stared at them when they stood up as well “Guys?”

“We have decided that you are not going to go back to Ravenclaw on your own” Sally said, and the other two nodded.

“Why?”

“People know you are involved with us” Harry said, glancing round the common room “Maybe not why, or how much, but we haven't exactly been discrete about knowing you”

“And you think...”

“Yup”

“Really?”

“Yup”

xoxox

“Viktor?” Hermione came to a stop outside the Tower “What are you doing here?”

"I have to talk to you" He looked around "Can we go for a walk?" She glanced at the others, but before she could say anything, he continued "They should come"

"Viktor?" He looked around again.

"Can we talk outside?" Sally stared at him for a few seconds, then nodded.

xoxox

"I do not know why, but Master Karkaroff has been acting very strangely for the past few days" The five of them were walking down by the Quidditch pitch.

"Strangely?"

"He has been... is the word jumpy?" Hermione nodded "He has been jumpy, and secretive"

"But you don't know why?"

"No" Viktor said, then added "But he has been holding his left arm quite a lot" He realised that the other four were all staring at him "What?"

"What do you know about The Dark Mark?"

"It is Voldemort's sign. He makes it appear in the sky after he kills someone" He looked at them "Is there something else?"

"Yes" Hermione sighed "There is something else" She took a deep breath "Death Eaters, when they are initiated by Voldemort, have a tattoo burned in to their skin by him. He uses it to signal them, and to punish them" She looked at him "It is burned in to the left arm"

"So Karkaroff would have one?"

"Yes" Sally nodded.

"And if he is grabbing his left arm" Harry continued "Then it is a fair bet that his Dark Mark is becoming active again" They sat in silence for a few minutes.

"I can keep an eye on my Headmaster" Viktor said "If you start lurking around in the Durmstrang quarters, someone will notice"

"And he won't suspect you?" Luna asked.

"I am his student..."

"But, as you three were pointing out to me about half an hour ago, Mr Krum has been spending a lot of time with us in the past few months. Isn't it possible that someone is going to start to ask what he is doing?" She stared at Hermione "Aside from the obvious, of course" Both Hermione and Viktor blushed, but Harry laughed.

"What is so amusing, Mr Potter?"

"I was thinking that, for maybe the first time in four years, Ron and Ginny might serve a practical purpose" He smiled "With all the attention they are drawing to Minnie and Viktor, no one is going to think about what else they might be doing together" When he stopped talking, he realised why everyone was staring at him "Not that you are doing... anything"

"Indeed?" Hermione smirked, then she shivered "We should be going. It's getting cold"

xoxox

"Do you know when the next Hogsmeade weekend is?" Harry asked. He, Sally and Luna were walking a few paces ahead of Hermione and Viktor.

"Two weeks or so I think" Luna glanced back "You want to plan something special for them?"

"The third task is in five weeks" Sally said softly "He might not be around after that"

"You think he would go back to Bulgaria?" Luna looked at them, then understanding dawned in her eyes "That's not what you meant, is it?"

"More or less" Harry smiled "I don't know about Durmstrang's school rules, but he might have to return in order to finish school and get his... what do they get in Durmstrang?"

“Hermione would know” Sally said “Do you think we should ask her now?” They all glanced behind them, and saw the couple in deep conversation.

“Maybe later” Luna gave a small smile “I am not sure any interruption would be... urk!” Harry turned to see what had caused the strange noise Luna had made.

“Luna?”

“Down here” As Hermione and Viktor rushed up behind them, Harry and Sally both knelt down to help Luna to her feet. When she had got up, and dusted herself off, they all looked down again, trying to see what she had slipped on. A moment later, they spotted it.

xoxox

“PROFESSOR MCGONAGALL!” Hermione and Sally had been tearing through the school for the past five minutes, and McGonagall was the first teacher they had come across.

“Miss Granger? Miss Perks? What is the meaning of this?”

“You have to come with us” Sally said, trying to get her breath back  
“There's a body”

“A body?” The transfigurations teacher stared at them “What are you talking about?”

“We found a body in the grounds” Hermione said desperately “Harry, Luna and Viktor are still there” McGonagall stared at them in disbelief.

“You are serious?”

“Yes, Professor” Sally replied, trying to contain her annoyance “We are serious”

“Very well then – lead the way”

xoxox

“Did you two pick your names yet?” The three of them were sat round the body, all holding their wands. After a few moments

discussion, they had decided Hermione and Sally should find a teacher, since they were both capable of defending themselves.

"I was thinking about Eris" Luna said with a faint smile.

"It kind of suits you" Harry smiled.

"Thank you" The young girl turned to Viktor "What about you?"

"Mr Smith" The Bulgarian said, then smirked at the expression on his companions' faces "You don't approve?"

"It's not what I was expecting" Harry replied.

"I think it's perfect" Luna grinned at him, then her gaze drifted back to the body "So – who do you think it is?"

"It's not one of the teachers" Harry replied.

"How do you know?"

"He would have been missed by now" He turned to Viktor "Anyone you recognise?"

"No" The young man shook his head "It is not a Bulgarian cloak"

"Should we..." Luna mimed rolling the body over.

"Do you really want to touch it?" Harry asked in surprise. She paused, then shook her head "Sally and Min will be back in a few minutes, hopefully with a teacher" As he finished speaking, he caught sight of three figures coming towards them. He gave a small gesture, and all three of them stood up, wands raised in readiness.

xoxox

"Harry – it's us" Sally called out. She could see the wands, and thought that having her boyfriend open fire on the deputy headmistress might not be the best thing in the current situation. A moment later, the wands were lowered.

"That was quick" He smiled as they walked over, then he turned to McGonagall "We didn't want to touch it"



"I can understand that" McGonagall said softly, then she pulled out her wand "Wingardium Leviosa".

The body levitated in to the air, then, after another twist of her wand, it turned over, and lowered itself.

"Mr Crouch?" Hermione's shock was palpable.

"So it would appear" McGonagall's face went white, but that was the only sign of distress she permitted herself to make "I realise it is late, but if I could ask you to wait here a few minutes more, I will have to summon the Headmaster, and he will want to speak with you all"

"Yes Professor" McGonagall gave a slight nod, then she turned back to the castle.

"Expecto Patronum!" A small cat appeared from the end of the wand "Tell The Headmaster what has happened, and ask him to summon the aurors" The cat nodded, then bounded off in the direction of the castle. She turned back "Are you all alright?"

xoxox

"Minister Fudge" Dumbledore took a deep breath, and released it slowly. Ever since Fudge had walked in the office, the evening had become an exercise in controlling his temper. Not that this was anything new – the foolish, pompous boy that Dumbledore remembered teaching had not grown any less foolish – nor any less pompous – when he ascended to the highest office. But tonight, it appeared Cornelius was in one of his more contrary moods "I understand why you are asking, but I do not understand why you are asking now?"

"The Tournament will be over very soon, and I don't want to lose the initiative" Fudge leaned forward on the desk "Setting it up while they are here would be a lot easier" The Minister paused "Especially if we try to arrange it before we know the winner"

"Very well" Dumbledore sighed "Do you wish to ask them?"

"I think it would be better coming from you, Albus" Fudge smiled "This should not really be a political matter – it should remain within the educational arena, don't you think?"

“Yes” The Headmaster smiled at him, then suddenly he stood up.

“Albus?” Fudge turned, and saw a small, silver cat. A moment later, it spoke.

“Albus. We have found the body of Mr Crouch in the grounds. Please come” Fudge turned and stared at Dumbledore.

“Albus?”

“May I suggest that we postpone this meeting for the moment, Minister? I believe that we are needed outside”

“Of course”

xoxox

“You didn't see anyone?” Half an hour later, everyone was gathered in Dumbledore's office. The aurors had taken away the body, and were now questioning the five students.

“No” Sally said quietly “We were coming back to the school when we found... when we found Mr Crouch”

“Why were you out there?” McGonagall asked.

“We were talking” Harry replied, glancing at the others “We were discussing possible celebration parties for when Viktor wins the Tournament”

“And the reason you could not discuss that indoors?”

“We didn't think it was polite, Professor” Luna replied with a smile “For some reason, most of the Hogwarts' students don't want Viktor to win” McGonagall turned to her.

“You don't say, Miss Lovegood” She turned to the Headmaster “Professor Dumbledore – is there any reason why we need the students here any longer?”

“One more moment” Dumbledore turned to Viktor “Mr Krum – when did you last see your Headmaster?”

“Just before I met up with Minnie, Professor” He glanced at the Hogwarts' students “He was leaving his quarters. I do not know where he was going”

“Did he seem alright? Was there anything wrong?”

“Not that I could tell, sir” Viktor frowned “He was in a... rush? He was moving quickly”

“Any idea where he was going?”

“No sir”

“He's missing, isn't he sir?” Hermione asked. Dumbledore turned to stare at her.

“How do you know that, Miss Granger?”

“Even though Viktor is of age, he is still a student. If his Headmaster were available, he would be here” Hermione replied “So – is he missing?”

“Yes” Fudge said “It appears that he vanished about half a hour before you found Mr Crouch's body” He looked towards the students “Are you sure there is nothing else you can tell us about this evening?”

“No sir” Sally said “That's all we know” She paused for a moment “Sir?”

“Yes, Miss Perks?”

“How did he die?” Fudge looked at Dumbledore, who nodded.

“According to the aurors, he was tortured to death” He saw the looks on their faces “I know – it is not a nice way to go”

“Will the tournament be cancelled, sir?” Luna asked. Fudge gave her a brief smile.

“I am sure that will be discussed in the near future, Miss Lovegood” He turned to Dumbledore “Do we need the students for anything else?”

"Not at the moment, Minister" Dumbledore acknowledged, then he turned to one of the aurors "Would you mind escorting them back to their various houses?"

"Of course not, Headmaster" The auror nodded, and a moment later, they were all being lead down the stairs to the main passage way.

xoxox

"I will talk to you tomorrow" Viktor said "I should see what is happening if Master Karkaroff has left"

"Okay" Hermione leaned over and kissed him "Take care"

"I will" He waved to the others, then went in to the common room that had been set aside for the Durmstrang students.

xoxox

"See you tomorrow at breakfast" Luna smiled "And try not to stay up too late talking about this"

"We will try" Harry gave her a hug, followed by Sally "Do you want us to meet you here tomorrow?"

"Don't worry about it" She smiled "I will meet you downstairs" She turned to the auror "Thank you for escorting me back"

"It was my pleasure" The young woman gave a brief bow "Sleep well"

"Good night"

xoxox

"Well – here we are" The group arrived at their final destination, and the auror turned to them "I hope I don't have to remind you not to leave the common room again tonight. While I don't think whoever killed Mr Crouch will still be around, it is better to be safe than sorry"

"Don't worry" Harry nodded "We won't be going anywhere until tomorrow"

"Glad to hear it" She gave them a quick smile, then turned and walked back down the corridor towards the Headmaster's office. The

three students watched her go, then went in to the common room, and sat down near the fireplace.

“So – murder” Harry said.

“So it would seem” Hermione replied.

“You think Karkaroff did it?”

“No” Harry and Sally turned to her, looking surprised “Well – probably not”

“Why not?”

“From what Viktor said I got the idea that Karkaroff isn't happy about Voldemort's impending return” She looked at Sally “He sold out a lot of the other Death Eaters at his trial, and if” She paused “Or when our favourite Dark Lord returns, I don't think he will be too happy with the Durmstrang Headmaster”

“You think he's on the run?” Sally asked in surprise. Hermione nodded “I guess that makes sense” She looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece “We should get some sleep” She smirked “I have this feeling tomorrow is going to be interesting”

xoxox

“I am afraid I have some sad news to announce this morning” Dumbledore stood up at breakfast the next morning “Last night, Bartemius Crouch was found dead on the grounds” He waited for the murmurs to die down “At the moment, the cause of death has not been determined, and the investigation is on going” He resisted the urge to look down the Gryffindor table “After a lot of discussion with representatives from the other schools, and from the DMLE and Ministry, we have decided to let the Tournament continue. However we will be increasing the auror presence around the castle until the final task is complete” He looked around “If anyone has any questions, you should refer them to your Head of House, or your Head Teacher” He paused “Thank you” He sat down, glancing at the various parts of the hall.

Most of the students seemed surprised, if not outright shocked. The group who had found the body the night before were obviously not surprised, but they did seem willing to hold their collective tongues

about the cause of death for the moment. After talking long in to the night, everyone had agreed that telling the children, and consequently the parents, that someone was tortured to death in the school was probably not the best idea. He knew that the secret would not last forever, but if he could hold out for the next few weeks – until the third and final task was complete – then life would be a lot easier.

He was fairly certain that Igor Karkaroff hadn't killed Barty Crouch – there was no reason for him to do it. It was far more likely that the Durmstrang Headmaster was now on the run, and, he reflected, probably dead. Which was more troubling than he would like.

Karkaroff dying would be a bad thing, but not as bad as the motive behind it. The only reason Dumbledore could think of for someone to kill the Durmstrang Master would be as punishment for naming names – for the actions he took during his trial.

“Which” He thought “Means that he thinks Voldemort is coming back. and that his followers are trying to curry some favour” He glanced down the Gryffindor table to where five students were huddled in a group “What do they know?”

xoxox

“They don't want panic” Hermione said softly “That's the only reason I can think of not to tell the truth” She looked at the others “If your parents – well” She smirked “Not your parents, because I know all of your parents, and they really aren't the type to panic, but say some generic parents...”

“We get the idea” Sally smiled “If Mrs Weasley or” She glanced around the table “Mr Creevey found out that someone had been tortured to death in the school...” She trailed off “There would be chaos”

“So – we all agree that this isn't some evil conspiracy?” Luna asked with a slight smile “Good. Because there is another problem you have to think about”

“There is?”

“The Press” Viktor said suddenly. Luna turned, and nodded to him.

“While Dumbledore and his band of merry men might be able to stall for a little while, the truth about what happened will come out” Her face turned serious “And it will also become known that the Heir to the Houses of Potter and Black found the body”

“I thought you found it” He said with a slight smile.

“And The Prophet might well enjoy that part, but do you honestly think that Miss Skeeter would even notice me when she can write the headline 'Potter Found Over Body Of Dead Ministry Employee'?” She paused for a moment “There is something I could try...”

“Yes?”

“If The Prophet does start writing their stories again, then maybe we could ask my father to put the other side” She watched them as they thought about it for a moment “I realise that The Quibbler could be seen as equally biased – people know we are friends – but it might help”

“I think that is a great idea” Sally said “Thank you”

“I am glad I could help” She looked around “So – are we still planning that celebration?”

## Chapter 13

Two weeks after the death of Crouch – two weeks before The Third Task – Harry came down to breakfast to see the headline that Luna had predicted. Although the article did not directly accuse Harry of involvement, Rita Skeeter made it very clear that his proximity to the body of someone who was tortured to death was somehow related to having a formerly suspected Death Eater as a guardian.

“Luna?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“Do you think we could meet your father sometime soon?”

“Yes, Harry” She paused “Do you want him to come here?” He looked up at her.

“Why?”

“There are no Hogsmeade weekends until after the end of the tournament, and although I know you could probably get to The Quibbler offices, I think that someone might get curious about how you can be in two places at once”

“If he comes here, won't someone ask why?” Luna stared at him in surprise.

“I suppose so” She sat down next to him “We could always say he has come to see about your suitability as his son-in-law” She smirked as spit out his orange juice “Just kidding”

“Luna!”

“You looked like you needed cheering up” She smiled at him “Maybe my timing could use some work”

“It seemed perfect to me” A voice came from behind them, and they both turned as Sally walked past them and sat down “But I am worried about one thing...”

“What's that?”



"You are the second girl in three years to ask him about an arranged marriage" She smirked as he blushed, remembering their first meeting "It could set a dangerous precedent"

"And speaking of arranged marriages" Luna nodded her head, and the two Gryffindors turned to see Ginny Weasley walking up to them.

"Am I the only one who has the urge to draw their wand?" Harry asked quietly, and gave a small chuckle when both Luna and Sally shook their heads.

"Mr Potter, I was wondering I might have a word with you?" Ginny arrived by his side.

"Can it wait?" He turned to her "After this morning's Prophet, I have a few things I would like to sort out as soon as I can"

"That was one of the things I wanted to talk to you about" She glanced at the two girls "In private, if you don't mind"

"Of course not" He gave Sally a quick smile, and then excused himself. They watched him go, then Sally turned to Luna.

"You don't think..."

"No" She shook her head "Vanessa made her a Slytherin for a reason, and I am pretty sure that she is not going to risk doing something when we both saw her leave with him"

"Good" Sally glanced to the door her boyfriend had just left "But anyway – do you think we can get Minnie to do an arranged marriage joke, or would that be pushing it too far?"

xoxox

"How can I be of assistance to you this morning, Miss Weasley?"

"I have been talking to my parents, and I have a proposition for you"

"Don't you think you are a little young to get married?" He was joking, but he saw a slight flash of... something in her eyes that made him curious.

"That wasn't what I meant" She replied, blushing "We think we have come up with a solution to a number of your problems"

"Really?" He raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"We know that you, and your guardian, don't like Albus Dumbledore all that much. And that both of you seem intent on defying him at every opportunity"

"We are?"

"Yes" She nodded "And that's why you are currently pretending to date Sally, while really you are going out with Luna"

"Is it?" He stared at her, face set in stone.

"Obviously" She smiled at him "So, my parents have decided to throw their lot in with you" She beamed at him.

"Throw their lot in'?" He looked at her questioningly "What do you mean?"

"An alliance" She said seriously "The House Of Weasley will formally join with The House Of Potter"

"Why would I do that?" He looked at her curiously "I have The House of Black on my side. Why would I need another one?"

"Is what Sally said at the end of last year true?"

"What did she say?"

"That You-Know-Who is coming back" She searched his face for any sign "Is it true?"

"Why do you ask?"

"If He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is coming back, then you will need all the help you can get" She said, the continued "And, I admit, that my family could also use some protection as well"

"So – this alliance would be purely for mutual protection?" Harry asked. When Ginny nodded, Harry smirked "So what does this have to do with my dating Sally or Luna?"

"The protection would extent to political and social as well" She smiled again "So you would have no need to hide behind pretend relationships to make your guardian happy" She reached over and took his hand "You could finally be free to explore other options" He stared at her for a few more moments, then he slowly withdrew his hand.

"Miss Weasley. Whether Lord Voldemort" He paused as she shivered "Returns or not, I do not believe that we will be needing your family's help. But thank you for your offer"

"What?" She leaped to her feet "You can't make that choice"

"Yes I can" He looked at her sternly "But if you want, I can talk to my Uncle Mike, and tell him to reject the offer on my behalf" He turned, and started to walk away.

"Why?" She called out "You will need us" He paused at the door, then turned to face her.

"I really won't" He replied, then turned and pulled the door open.

"This is your last chance, Potter" She yelled, but he simply walked out and closed the door "Your time is up, Mr Potter. Now it's my turn"

xoxox

"So – what did our favourite Slytherin want?" Sally smiled as Harry sat down next to her.

"To form an alliance between House Potter and House Weasley, for mutual protection in case Lord Voldemort returns" He replied, looking straight ahead.

"Really?"

"Well – not just that" He replied "She also said that this alliance would ensure that I was not stuck dating you to cover up the fact I am going out with Luna" This time he turned to face her, because he really wanted to see the expression on her face.

"Really?" It did not disappoint.

"Yes" He smiled "But, you will be glad to know that I didn't think that The Order needed help from House Weasley, and that I am quite happy pretending to date you while I secretly romance Luna"

"Good to hear it" She smiled "So – do we get to do something to her now?"

"Let's wait for the end of The Tournament" He gave her a brief smile  
"We wouldn't want anything to get in the way of Viktor's glorious win now, would we?"

xoxox

"We would just like to make it absolutely clear that, while The Heir To The House Of Potter was one of the students who found the body of the late Mr Crouch, we did not intend to imply that we was responsible for the death, nor that his relationship with the former wanted fugitive Sirius Black had any bearing on the death of the Ministry Employee"

Harry put the paper down and looked at his girlfriend.

"They do say that it is the thought that counts" Sally smiled back.

"If that's the case, I think we should be really insulted"

xoxox

"It's a maze" Viktor came back from a meeting with the Heads of Schools, Bagman and Fudge with a smile on his face "The Third Task – we are to find our way through a maze, to get to the trophy in the centre"

"That's all? Just get through a maze?" Hermione asked, then she shook her head "It can't be as easy as that"

"It's not" Viktor sighed "Headmaster Dumbledore said there would be 'challenges both physical and mental'"

"That sounds like Dumbledore" Harry smiled "So – when will the maze be finished?"

"Tomorrow night"

"You ready?"

"I think so" He shrugged "We will find out tomorrow night"

"You'll do fine, honey" Hermione smiled at him, then she glanced at the others "Is there any way we could help?"

"I don't see how" Sally replied "I am guessing the maze will be under guard until the start of the task, so we can't cast any support spells, for want of a better phrase"

"And if they are planning any non-magical surprises – like animals or the like – then they would have to put up obscuring spells to stop anyone seeing" Harry continued.

"So – what you are saying is no" Hermione sighed "I guess that was too much to ask" Viktor leaned over and took her hand.

"You can do what you did the last two times, Minnie" He smiled "Help me prepare for anything" He kissed her cheek, then turned to the others "You can help as well, if you want"

"I think this might be best done with just you two" Luna replied with a smile.

xoxox

"HARRY!" Sally sat bolt upright in bed, unable to stifle the scream that ripped out of her mouth. A moment later, Hermione was at her bedside "Min – we have to..."

"I know" Her friend said softly "You go to The Chamber, and will see if he is next door"

"But..."

"Sal – trust me. You need to calm down before you see him" Hermione smiled at her "Go. We will be there shortly"

"Okay" Sally took a deep breath, then closed her eyes. A moment later, she vanished. Hermione looked around, then did the same.

xoxox

"Harry?" Hermione appeared in the boy's dorm, and made her way over to Harry's bed. She pulled the curtains aside, only to find it completely empty. She was about to wake the others, to find out if

they knew when Harry vanished, when she saw a small piece of paper. She picked it up, and smiled "So much for my plan" A moment later, she vanished.

xoxox

When she reappeared, she couldn't help laughing out loud.

"I know" Harry replied "But I couldn't dissuade her"

"Shush you" Sally waved her hand at both of them, then went back to examining Harry for signs of injury. Hermione watched, with a slight smile at the look of discomfort on Harry's face, until Sally was done, then she turned to Harry.

"You had the same nightmare?"

"Does that surprise you?" He shivered "What do you remember?"

xoxox

*She saw him screaming, but knew that there was nothing she could do. She glanced at Sally, and realised that, whatever she might be going through, it was nothing compared to the girl next to her.*

*"You can't do anything" She whispered.*

*"I know" Came the reply.*

*"You know what Glinda said"*

*"I know" This time Sally turned to stare at her, and Hermione could see the tears in her eyes "I just want this over. And I want. Him. Dead"*

*After a moment, the screaming stopped, and they saw him flop forward on to the ground.*

*"So, Mr Potter. It comes down to this" The voice resounded through the graveyard, even though it was almost quieter than a whisper "You thought to defy me, to set your will against that of The Dark Lord" There was a strange, rasping noise. It took her a few minutes to work out that it was laughter "You will soon learn the depth of your folly"*

*She tore her gaze away from the shadow at the centre of the circle, and started to examine the figures surrounding them. Twelve of them, all dressed in jet-black cloaks, and – from the few she could see – bone-white masks.*

xoxox

“You don't know who the Death Eaters were?”

“No” Hermione shook her head “They were all wearing masks, and I don't remember them speaking” She turned to Sally “Sal?”

“I think I heard one of two of them” She smirked “But that was after we attacked” She looked at Harry “You?”

“It's the first thing I remember”

xoxox

*As he came round, he realised he was tied... no. Not tied, but somehow bound to a statue. As he looked around, he realised that he was being held against the statue by the wings of the angel it portrayed.*

*“MORSE MORDE!” He shivered as he heard the spell, then, craning his neck backwards, he saw The Dark Mark appear in the sky. A few moments later, the first Death Eater appeared. A few seconds later, the first Death Eater appeared. A few seconds later, the first Death Eater appeared. A few seconds later, the first Death Eater appeared.*

*“My friends. It is good to see you again” The voice was quiet, almost a whisper. But it carried with it the tone of one who knows they are in charge, and one who will expect to be obeyed “It has been too long since we stood together” He continued to prowl around the circle.*

xoxox

“That was when I picked up the names” Harry said “Voldemort kindly took it upon himself to name all twelve of the Death Eaters in the circle”

“Then?” Harry turned to Hermione.

"That's where your story started" They both turned to Sally. She nodded, then started her story.

xoxox

*"Nothing to say, Mr Potter?" The voice turned mocking "That does surprise me. Our mutual friend tells me that you normally can't shut up"*

*Sally glanced across at Hermione, and gestured to the left. Her friend nodded, and started to move slowly around the outside of the graveyard. Sally cast one more glance back at the centre of the circle, then started to move the other way*

*"So this is how the great and glorious Harry Potter ends up" The voice was growing stronger, and louder "Beaten, broken, friendless and alone"*

*"Oh Tom" Sally turned, realising that this was the first time her boyfriend had spoken since she arrived "You really don't know me at all, do you?" Sally risked a glance towards her boyfriend, and saw that, despite the blood running down his face, he was smiling. She let herself relax a little, then continued to move round to her destination.*

*"Enlighten me then, Mr Potter" The voice had returned to its previous mocking tone "Tell me all about yourself, so that, when I kill you, I will know exactly who I am killing"*

*"Tom" Sally crouched down, and slowly drew her wand, waiting for the signal "I might be beaten. I might be broken" He paused, and Sally could see the smile growing bigger "But I am not friendless. And I am never alone"*

*"Really?" There was another bout of laughing "Then tell me, Boy Who Lived, where are your friends?"*

xoxox

"That's pretty much when I woke up" Sally replied "After we attacked, and the angel let you go, he threw a killing curse at you. That was what snapped me out of it" She glanced at Hermione "Did you see anything after that?"



"A flash of light, but" She held her hands up "I heard you scream, and it woke me up"

"Sorry" They both turned to Harry "You?"

"I woke up about the same time" He said "I can't remember if the killing curse hit or not" He shivered "So now – the big question"

"What do we do now?" Sally asked, and Harry nodded "I am guessing that you don't want to get captured by Voldemort?"

"Good guess" He smiled softly, then his smile faded "I think we have to talk to Dumbledore"

"I agree" Hermione added "If Voldemort is back, the Headmaster might be able to do something about it, and prevent what we saw"

"Okay" He sighed "I will talk to him tomorrow, after breakfast" He looked around the Chamber "I suppose we should all get back to bed now?"

"Might be wise" Sally leaned over and kissed him "Try and get some sleep?"

"I'll try" He nodded, then vanished. Sally turned to Hermione.

"Do you think he will?"

"Could you?"

xoxox

Luna sat down to breakfast the next morning, and looked at her friends.

"You don't look so good. Anything wrong?"

"Nightmares" He said softly "Didn't get a lot of sleep"

"Sorry" She looked at him sympathetically "I had kind of a weird dream"

"Scary weird?"

"No – just weird" She shrugged "I mean – it was fairly normal, up until about two minutes before I woke up. Then it all went dark, and I heard a voice saying 'They have to walk in to darkness, or they'll end up fighting smoke'" She looked at them "You know what that means" The three of them looked at each other, then turned back to the third year girl.

"We do" Sally said "Can you tell us anything else?"

"No – that was all the voice said" Luna replied "But I thought I recognised it – it was like someone I had always known, but never met" She realised they were staring at her "I know – it doesn't make much sense" She suddenly snapped her fingers "Earlier in the dream, I met the Good Witch Of The North" She beamed "I decided to change my name, if that's okay"

"That is fine" Hermione smiled at her, then glanced at the others "I guess that settles what we do now"

"Yup" Sally said, then she took Harry's hand "Don't worry. We'll be ready"

"I know" He smiled at her "I'm just worried about what happened before I woke up"

xoxox

"I don't like this" Hermione said worriedly. The four students were sat in the stands at the edge of the Quidditch pitch. The Third task had been under way for an hour, and there was no sign that anyone was returning with the trophy "How long can it take?"

"No one has sent up any red flags yet" Luna said, taking Hermione's hand "If they were in serious trouble, we would have seen something by now"

But what if they can't..." She trailed off as there was a flash of light that filled the air. As it faded, there was a sudden scream from the front row. The four students blinked a few times, then stared down to the entrance of the maze.

There was a body, holding The Tri-Wizard Trophy.

xoxox

"Potter!" Moody's voice came from behind them, and they all turned. After they had realised that it wasn't Viktor, but Cedric, who was lying dead at the entrance to the maze, Sally had lead them all off to one side to wait for Viktor.

"Yes, Professor?"

"Dumbledore wants you to come with me. He thinks this is a prelude to something, and he wants to make sure you're safe"

"Yes, Professor" Harry turned to the others "Wait for Viktor here, then come and find me"

"Okay" Hermione gave him a hug, then kissed his cheek. Luna did the same, then Sally kissed him softly on the lips.

"Be safe, my love"

"I will" He smiled, then he turned back to Moody "I'm ready, Professor"

xoxox

"You should be safe here lad" Moody said, as they neared the castle.

"It's alright, Professor" Harry stopped and faced him "I know why you are here, and what you have to do"

"You do, do you?"

"Yes sir" Harry replied "So – get it over with" Moody glared at him for a few moments, then smiled.

"The Dark Lord underestimated you, son" Moody put his hand in his pocket, then pulled out a small ring "Do I have to force you?"

"No, sir, you don't" Harry shook his head, then took the ring. A moment later, he vanished.

## Chapter 14

Sirius turned in surprise as Hermione appeared behind him.

“Min?”

“Harry's been kidnapped by Voldemort. Sally and I are going after him, but you should come to Hogwarts for when we come back” She vanished, leaving him staring at the wall behind her.

xoxox

Susan turned in surprise as Sally appeared behind her.

“Hon?”

“Harry's been kidnapped by Voldemort. Hermione and I are going after him, but you should come to Hogwarts for when we come back” She vanished, leaving her staring at the fireplace.

xoxox

“So – you ready to go?” Sally and Hermione had returned to their bodies, and, along with Luna and Viktor, were stood off to the side of the main arena. Luna had been checking they had everything.

“As ready as we can be” Sally said with a smile.

“How are you going to find him?” Viktor asked.

“I gave him the astral beacon” Hermione replied “When I hugged him, I slipped it in to his robes. We will be able to track it when we start to move”

“But he doesn't know?”

“No” Sally gave a brief, grim smile “That way, he won't have to lie about it” She turned to Hermione “Ready?”

“Ready”

“Then lets go get our boy” There was a pause, then they both vanished. Luna and Viktor stared at the empty ground for a moment,

then they turned, heading back to where they knew Sirius and Susan would be arriving soon.

xoxox

"Potter... Harry... Help me" Harry turned at the sound of the voice, then put his hand out to steady himself against a gravestone. The portkey had left him feeling disorientated, dizzy and somewhat nauseous, and, from experience, he knew it would be a few minutes before the feeling faded.

When he opened his eyes again, he considered the possibility that he should add hallucinations to the side-effects of portkey travel, because there was no way that Draco Malfoy was asking him for help. Even if he was tied up against a cross.

"Draco? What's going on?" He started to walk towards the former Slytherin, the disorientation fading with each step.

"The Dark Lord took me and my mother prisoner, after my father vanished" Draco said pitifully "He's held me all year, and wants to use me as a sacrifice" He glanced around furtively "Can you get me out of here?"

"I can try" Harry said, and walked towards him. He walked round to the back of the cross, and started to examine the ropes "Draco – there's something you should know"

"What?"

"Your father is dead" He heard the boy draw in a sharp breath "Dumbledore had him killed to stop him talking" Draco was quiet for a long time "I'm sorry"

"Thank you" Draco said quietly "Can you cut the ropes or not?"

"I think so" Harry paused "Hold still - I wouldn't want to cut you accidentally"

"Of course not"

"Diffindo!" The ropes split, and fell around Draco's ankles. Draco heaved a sigh of relief, then took a step forward "I don't know how to get out of here. Moody gave me a portkey, but I don't know..." Harry trailed off, when he realised Draco was now pointing a wand at him.

"Drop it" Draco said in a polite tone "And don't try anything – you know it won't work" Harry stared at him for a moment, then he opened his hand, and let his wand fall to the grass by his feet "Very good, Potter" Draco drawled "And I thought the mudblood was the brains of the outfit"

"So – what's next?" Harry asked, trying to keep a conversational tone "And where is your Lord and Master?"

"He will be here soon" Draco said "I was given the honour of welcoming you, since we are such good friends" He smirked "I had the honour of welcoming Diggory too. Although, he didn't stay for long"

"So you are ready for your mark then Draco?" Harry glanced around, but couldn't see anyone else "Is Voldemort that desperate for followers that he is recruiting children now?"

"SILENCE!" Draco slapped him hard across the face, causing Harry to take a step back "No one talks of our Lord in that way" He took another step forward, but then stopped as the sound of a door opening carried across the graveyard. Harry, wiping his mouth, turned to see Snape coming in from the far end, carrying a bundle wrapped in a black cloak.

"Draco – please ensure Mr Potter is taken care of"

"Yes, Severus" Draco replied. He turned, and a moment later, Harry found himself levitated against the statue of an angel. Seconds later, the wings of the angel closed, holding him in place.

"Seems I underestimated you, Draco" Harry called out "You have your mark already, don't you?"

"Of course I do, Potter" Draco boasted "And in a few moments, I will serve at my Lord's right hand, and you, the great hero of wizarding kind, will be dead"

xoxox

"I will serve at my Lord's right hand, and you, the great hero of wizarding kind, will be dead" Sally and Hermione appeared behind a gravestone just in time to hear the end of Draco's speech. Hermione smirked, while Sally rolled her eyes. They both peered out, and took

in the scene in front of them. Harry was pinned against the angel, while Draco was turning to light the fire under a huge cauldron. Sally caught sight of something else, and turned Hermione's head so she could see it too.

"Snape" Sally signed to her, and Hermione nodded "What's he holding?"

"Not a clue" Hermione responded in kind "But we seem to have got here earlier than last night"

"I know" Sally smiled, then gestured "We should get the spell ready"

"Okay" Hermione squeezed her hand once, then moved off to her left, careful to stay low. Sally cast one more longing look at her boyfriend, then moved off to the right.

xoxox

Harry watched in horrified fascination as Snape and Draco went about preparing for their ritual. Draco was pouring various ingredients in to the cauldron, while Snape was levitating the top off of a sarcophagus. He couldn't turn his head far enough to make out the name on the grave, but, from the sounds that followed, it was clear Snape was indulging in a bit of grave-robbing. But then he heard a voice that drove out every other thought in his head. It was a voice he hadn't heard in three years, and yet it was still as scary as it was then.

"Are you ready, Severus?"

"Yes, My Lord" Snape replied, then he turned to Draco, who nodded firmly, although Harry realised that the former Slytherin student was looking a little paler than before.

"Then we begin" Snape turned to Harry "You should be honoured, Mr Potter. You are to be present during one of the greatest moments in history"

"I have already done that when I kicked Voldemort's ass, and I wasn't even out of nappies" Harry responded, but Snape merely laughed at him.

"Let's see if you can be as brave when we are done" The potions master paused, then he calmed himself "Bone of the father, unwillingly given" He chanted, and Harry saw a skull float across in front of him, then plunge in to the cauldron "Flesh of the servant, gratefully given" He nodded to Draco, who, after taking a deep breath, drew a sharp knife from his robe and slashed his own left hand off. It fell in to the cauldron with a sploosh, and Draco gave a wan smile. Then the young boy turned towards Harry, still holding the knife "And blood of the enemy, forcibly taken"

xoxox

"And blood of the enemy, forcibly taken" Sally's head shot up as she heard these words. She watched as Draco approached Harry, still holding the knife, and then bit her lip as Draco stabbed Harry in the arm. Every instinct she had told her to run to her boyfriend, and curse Draco until he was unconscious. But she knew that she was outnumbered, and close to being outmatched.

"Still" She thought "Just because I can't do it now, doesn't mean I can't do it later"

xoxox

Harry watched Draco drop his knife in the cauldron, then turned back to stare at Snape. His former teacher lifted the bundle, then threw it in to the cauldron. He caught a quick flash of what looked like... a baby, but then it vanished in to the steaming water.

xoxox

Hermione watched as the cauldron started to smoke, and realised that, the next time she encountered a boggart, it would not turn in to a dementor. Whatever Snape and Malfoy were doing, it was very, very dark magic.

"They are bringing him back" She thought "Oh god. They are bringing him back"

xoxox

After the cauldron had stopped billowing smoke, and the black clouds had dissipated, there was a moment of complete silence through the graveyard. Then, as Harry, Sally and Hermione watched



in mounting horror, a figure – a black shadow – rose out of the steaming water. It rose until it floated high above the water, darkness gathered all around it. Snape and Malfoy fell to their knees, while Harry, Sally and Hermione continued to stare in disbelief. The cauldron vanished, and the figure slowly floated to the ground.

“Robe me” Snape leapt to his feet, and draped a robe round the figure's shoulders “My wand”

“Here, my Lord” Malfoy handed the long, thin piece of wood over, then dropped back to his knees.

“Thank you, Malfoy” The voice was quiet, but carried the tone of one who expected to be obeyed “Give me your arm” Malfoy held out his left arm “Let us summon our friends”

xoxox

Sally drew her wand, and stared as Voldemort pressed his wand in to Draco Malfoy's left arm. The silver-haired boy screamed in pain, but the shadow only pressed harder. A moment later, a thunderclap filled the sky. She stared up, and shivered as The Dark Mark appeared above the graveyard.

Less than a minute later, the silence in the graveyard was punctuated by twelve popping sounds. Black bursts of smoke resolved in to twelve people, dressed in dark robes, all with bone white masks.

xoxox

“My friends” The voice echoed through the graveyard that had once again fallen silent “It is good to see you again” He started to pace round the circle “It has been too long since we stood here, together”

xoxox

Hermione listened as Voldemort named the inner circle, hoping that Sally was making the same list of names as she was. She adjusted her position slightly, and continued to watch the unfolding drama.

xoxox

"But now we must welcome our guest" The dark wizard spun round, his cloak billowing, and strode towards the angel that was holding Harry "Mr Potter. The Boy Who Lived. I believe you are almost as famous as I am"

"More so" Harry yelled "I never got my ass kicked by a child" Voldemort paused, then turned to stare at him.

"A sense of humour" The voice gave a small, rasping laugh "I think we should break you of that" A wave of the wand, and Harry fell to the ground "Malfoy"

"Yes, my Lord?"

"Give him his wand"

"My Lord?"

"CRUCIO!"

xoxox

Hermione tensed as Draco fell to the floor, screaming in agony. A few moments ago, she had wanted this boy dead for what he had done. Now, she thought, I would give anything to be able to save him.

xoxox

"Malfoy"

"Yes, my Lord?" Draco's voice was a lot less confident now.

"Give him his wand"

"Yes, my Lord" Harry took his wand, then faced Voldemort.

"Now, Mr Potter, we duel"

"No"

xoxox

Sally couldn't help smiling. The look of utter surprise on Voldemort's face was one she would remember for a long, long time. But then, in a single word, her world exploded.

xoxox

“CRUCIO!”

xoxox

She saw him screaming, but knew there was nothing she could do. She thought about Sally, and realised that, whatever she might be going through, it was nothing compared to the torment her friend must be suffering.

After a moment, the screaming stopped, and she saw Harry flop to the ground.

xoxox

“So, Mr Potter. It comes down to this” The voice resounded through the graveyard, though Voldemort barely spoke above a whisper “You thought to defy me. To say no to me. To set your will against the greatest wizard in history” There was another raspy laugh “You will soon learn the depth of your folly” Harry rolled over, and then pushed himself up to his knees. A moment later, he was standing.

“If..” He started, then coughed “If you are the greatest wizard in history, and I vanquished you, what does that make me?”

“CRUCIO!”

xoxox

Sally jammed her fist in to her mouth to stop the cry that threatened to escape. She knew what her boyfriend was doing, but knowing didn't make it any easier to watch.

xoxox

“So – you know the prophecy?” The voice kept its same tone, as if Voldemort had met Harry in The Great Hall, and they were simply talking over lunch “That you are the only one who can defeat me?” Voldemort laughed again “And yet you still ask me for death with every word you say” He turned to stare at Harry “Nothing to say, Mr

Potter? That does surprise me. My most loyal tells me that normally he can't keep you quiet"

xoxox

Sally uttered a silent wish, then raised her wand.

xoxox

"Is this how you want to die, Mr Potter? Beaten. Broken. Friendless and Alone?"

"Oh Tom" Harry's voice was clear, if weaker than normal "You don't know me at all, do you?"

xoxox

Hermione smiled as her friend rallied, then raised her wand.

xoxox

"Then enlighten me, Mr Potter" Voldemort resumed his previous, mocking tone "Tell me all about The Boy Who Lived, before you become The Boy Who Died"

"I might be beaten" Harry said, taking a step forward "And I might be broken" He took another step forward "But I will never be friendless" He took a third step, and brought himself nose to nose with Voldemort "And I will never. Be. Alone"

"Then tell me, Boy Who Lived" Voldemort sneered at him "Where are your friends?"

xoxox

"REDUCTO!" Sally blew up the sarcophagus Snape had used earlier. At the same time, she saw Hermione blow up the angel that had been holding Harry. The Death Eaters dived for cover, and Voldemort turned, trying to find the source of the blasting curses.

xoxox

"That would be them now" Harry said, throwing himself to the ground "And, I am sorry to hit and run, but I really have to go. My Uncle will

be missing me, and you have no idea how much he worries when I am not home in time for tea” A moment later, he vanished.

xoxox

Sally watched Harry taunt Voldemort one last time, then smiled as he disappeared. She glanced around, then, after firing a particularly nasty boil curse at Malfoy, she vanished as well.

xoxox

Hermione ducked as Snape fired a stunning curse at her, and responded with a banishing hex that sent him flying through the air and in to the side of a crypt. She watched him fall to the floor, then closed her eyes and vanished.

xoxox

“Uncle Mike” Sally yelled at the top of her voice. She had reappeared almost on top of her boyfriend, only to find him passed out on the grass. Hermione had appeared a moment later, and the two of them had picked up their friend, and carried him towards the castle.

“Sally?” Sirius, Susan, Viktor and Luna turned, then ran over to the group.

“We need to get him to the hospital wing” Sally said urgently “He needs attention now”

“What happened?” Susan asked as Sirius conjured a stretcher and levitated Harry on to it.

“He's back” Hermione said softly “Voldemort's returned”

## Chapter 15

"MADAM POMFREY!" Hermione yelled at the top of her voice as they entered the infirmary. Sirius levitated Harry to the nearest bed, then pulled up two chairs. He and Susan sat down, both with their wands out. Luna paused for a moment, then she and Viktor each took up a position at the main entrance to the infirmary.

"What is going on here?" The matron of the hospital wing came out of her office, and stared at the scene, but before she could make any more complaint, Sally pointed to the bed.

"Harry's been hurt" Pomfrey changed directions effortlessly, and walked across to the bed. She glanced at Susan and Sirius, eyes raised.

"I don't normally allow wands in my infirmary, Mr Black"

"Someone in Hogwarts set him up to be attacked, Madam Pomfrey" Sirius replied "We are just being precautious" The matron stared at him for a moment, then nodded.

"Just don't get in the way" She turned back and continued to examine Harry. A few moments later, she turned to Hermione.

"Miss Granger - I need two phials of post-cruciatius potion. They are in the cabinet in my office"

"Yes Madam Pomfrey" She turned, and walked off to the office. The matron turned back to Sirius and Susan.

"Are you going to tell me what happened?" She stared at them "Someone tortured this boy, and I want to know who" There was a pause, then Sirius turned to Sally. She nodded, and walked to the foot of the bed.

"It was Voldemort"

xoxox

"This is a disaster, Dumbledore" Fudge was pacing back and forth in the Headmaster's office "Young Mr Diggory murdered! In full view of the press" He span round "Do you have any idea how this could

have happened?" Before Fudge could reply, the fireplace flared to life.

"Headmaster" Madam Pomfrey's face appeared in the flames "You are needed in the hospital wing" There was a pause "Minister Fudge, you should come too" The flames vanished as quickly as they had arrived. Dumbledore continued to stare at the fireplace for a moment, then turned to the Minister.

"Cornelius, I believe we are about to get some answers"

xoxox

"They are on their way" Madam Pomfrey withdrew her head from the fire, and walked back over to her patient "Mr Potter will be alright, as long as he gets some rest" She stared at the others "That means no large uses of magic, and no grand adventures"

"We will do our best" Sally replied with a soft smile "Although I can't promise you anything" She smirked "You might have noticed our lives have a tendency to get..." She waved her hands around "Interesting, despite our best efforts"

"Just as long as you try" She looked back at Harry "I am not sure he can take any more punishment without serious damage" When Sally's face paled, the matron walked round the bed to her "Don't worry, my dear – he will be fine"

"I know" Sally looked down at her boyfriend "I just don't like seeing him like this" Sirius stood up, and nodded to her. She smiled back gratefully, and moved to sit down, taking Harry's hand as she did.

For a few minutes, the hospital wing remained silent, as Pomfrey pottered around, and the others continued their vigil. Then, suddenly, Luna and Viktor tensed, and raised their wands. A second later, the others followed their lead, with Sirius moving to stand between Harry and the door, and Hermione covering Madam Pomfrey.

"Madam Pomfrey, I believe you summoned us?" Dumbledore and Fudge entered, then stopped at the number of wands pointing in their direction "I take it there is an explanation for this?"

“Mad-Eye Moody kidnapped Harry and the girls, and turned them over to Lord Voldemort” Sirius stated, causing Dumbledore to raise his eyebrows, and Fudge to let out an exclamation of surprise.

“Alastor kidnapped Harry?” Dumbledore could not mask his disbelief  
“Are you sure?”

“One eye, one leg. Former auror and the third DaDa teach to try to kill us in four years?” Sally said, standing up. Viktor looked round, and then moved over to sit next to the hospital bed “Yeah – we are fairly sure it was him” She saw Hermione smirk “So – do you want to hear our story?”

“Very well” Dumbledore glanced at Fudge “Would you like to go to my office, or...”

“Mr Potter shouldn't be moved” Madam Pomfrey said “I need to keep him in overnight”

“I am sure here will do” Fudge said amiably, then glanced at Pomfrey “I take it Mr Potter won't be able to give us his version of events”

“Not at the moment, no”

“Then” Fudge turned to Sally “If you would like to start, Miss Perks?”

“By all means” She paused, then, after a deep breath, continued “After Cedric's body appeared, the four of us went down to near the entrance of the maze, to wait for Viktor” She glanced at Hermione “Minnie was worried about Viktor, as he hadn't reappeared. While we were waiting, Professor Moody came up to us, and told us that you” She indicated Dumbledore “Wanted us moved to a safe place. He then gave us what turned out to be portkeys, that took us to a graveyard”

“Do you know where?” Fudge asked.

“No, but I think that Voldemort's father is buried there” Hermione spoke up.

“How do you know?”

“We'll get to that” Sally replied “Draco Malfoy was tied up. He claimed that he had been kidnapped after his father was murdered,



and that Voldemort was going to sacrifice him. Harry untied him, then Draco took him prisoner”

“Are you sure?” Dumbledore asked “Young Mr Malfoy didn't try to help Harry?”

“We are sure, sir” Hermione replied “He boasted about having a dark mark, and about being the one that murdered Cedric”

“And he took part in the ritual to bring Voldemort back, sir” Sally continued “After he tied Harry up...” She trailed off, remembering what she had witnessed “Sir?”

“Yes, Miss Perks?”

“Do you have a pensieve I can borrow?” She looked at Hermione.

xoxox

*“Bone of the father, unwillingly given. Flesh of the servant, gratefully given. And blood of the enemy, forcibly taken”*

xoxox

The memory faded at the point Sally and Hermione attacked. Neither of them wanted the Headmaster to know how the three of them had returned to Hogwarts.

“The portkeys Moody gave us returned us here, sir” Hermione finished off the story “And we brought Harry up here as soon as we came back” She walked over to join Sally by Harry's bed. The latter had not been able to bring herself to watch the events again, and had been sat by Harry since the memory started. For a few minutes, no one said anything, then Fudge turned to Dumbledore.

“That is the second time I have heard reference to a prophecy, Albus” The Minister said “Do you know the complete version of it?” Dumbledore paused for a moment, then shook his head.

“No, Minister. I don't” He looked around the hospital “I only know the gist of it”

“That Harry is the only one who can kill Voldemort?” Susan asked “And you didn't feel the need to share that with him when he asked you three years ago?”

"I wanted him to be able to enjoy his childhood" Dumbledore sighed  
"I thought if he knew, it would be too much of a burden" He looked down at the boy in the hospital bed "Perhaps I was mistaken"

"Okay" Susan nodded "Minister, what should we do now?"

"Do you have a copy of that list of names?"

"Yes" Hermione pulled out the list she had made in the graveyard, and handed it to the minister. He started reading.

"The three LeStranges, that makes sense. Avery, Nott, Rookwood and Dolohov – all very nasty men. Mulciber and Parkinson both work for the Ministry" He glanced at the two girls "You are sure these names?"

"Very, sir" Sally replied, and Hermione nodded in agreement.

"Crabbe and Goyle don't surprise me, given their kids behaviour" Sirius said.

"And Greengrass?" Susan asked.

"No connection at all. He wasn't in the last war, and there are no records in the Ministry about him" Fudge shrugged "Well - I will keep ask Amelia to keep an eye on them" He turned to Dumbledore "What about Snape?"

"What do you mean?"

"At the end of the first war, you assured us that he was a spy. That he was working for you, against Voldemort" Fudge paused "Do you still maintain that?"

"Of course, Cornelius"

"And what about now?" Susan asked, walking up to the Headmaster  
"Last year, after my daughter told you that Snape was working with Lucius to capture Pettigrew, you still continued to insist that Snape was innocent"

"And I believed he was"

"And now?"

"I have to admit that my faith seems to have been misplaced"

"So, if you have any further contact with your former potions professor, you will turn him over to the aurors?" Fudge asked.

"Of course" Dumbledore replied with a smile.

"And the same goes for young Mr Malfoy?" Sirius asked "I mean, what with him being a Death Eater and all"

"I am not convinced that..."

"He stabbed me, sir" Harry's voice surprised everyone, and they all turned to face him "He tied me to an angel, and then he stabbed me, and used my blood to bring back the monster that killed my parents" He paused, then continued "And he boasted about murdering Cedric" He closed his eyes for a moment, then turned to stare at Dumbledore "Whatever Draco is, he is a murderer and a Death Eater. You may want to redeem him, or give him a second chance to kill again, but I just want him in jail" He paused "Or dead"

"I trust that you understand me, Dumbledore" Fudge said "If you hear from Snape, or from young Mr Malfoy, I want to know"

"Indeed, Cornelius. I will, of course, ensure that they are treated as they should be" Dumbledore replied "Now, if there is no other business, I believe we should let Mr Potter get some rest"

"One more thing" Sirius said "Where's Moody?"

"I don't know" Dumbledore replied "I haven't seen him since the task started" He turned to the three students "Do you still believe it was him?"

"Yes"

"Yes"

"Yes"

"Very well" Fudge said "I will ask the aurors to keep an eye out for him" He turned to Sirius "Would you like some to remain here, in case he comes back?"

"If you don't mind" He turned to Dumbledore "And if the Headmaster doesn't mind"

"Do you really think it is necessary?"

"Yes" Susan replied "My children really pissed off Voldemort tonight, and if Moody is working for him, I would imagine that they would be a tempting target"

"But, if it helps, Sally and I will be sleeping here tonight" Hermione said "We don't want to leave Harry alone"

"Then we will call that settled" Fudge replied "I will send a couple of aurors here as soon as I can"

"Thank you, Minister" Harry said softly.

"It's not a problem" Fudge smiled, turning "I am sorry we woke you"

"It's okay, Minister" Harry replied "You know the truth now, and you can tell people how Cedric died"

"Indeed" Fudge nodded, then he and Dumbledore turned and left. A moment later, Madam Pomfrey, who had been sat quietly in the corner, bustled up to the bed.

"Mr Potter – you need sleep"

"No argument from me" Harry replied, already turning on his side. He glanced at Sally "You are really staying?"

"Of course"

"I thought I had..." He fell asleep while he was talking, causing Sally to smile fondly down at him. After a few moments, she turned back to the rest of the group.

"Can you stay? Until the aurors come?"

"Naturally" Sirius smiled, then looked around "Luna, Viktor – you don't mind staying on the doors?"

"No, Uncle Mike" They said in unison, causing Hermione to giggle.

"Okay. Sally, Hermione – get some sleep"

“Yes, Uncle Mike” Sally took the bed next to Harry, slipping her wand under her pillow, while Hermione took the bed opposite. Susan sat down between Harry and Sally, and Sirius walked over to Madam Pomfrey.

“Poppy”

“Sirius”

“I don't suppose you can seal the infirmary?”

“I can, but I don't like to”

“Because no one else would get in?”

“Yes”

“Then do you mind if Susan stays here tonight?”

“I thought the aurors...”

“They are” Sirius interrupted.

“Then why...”

“Mad-Eye Moody kidnapped my children” Sirius said softly “So, although I trust Cornelius to provide aurors who are not dark wizards, I would still prefer to have someone who can protect my children, and who I trust implicitly” The matron considered him for a moment, then nodded.

“She may stay” Sirius smiled, but Pomfrey held up her hand “But I should tell you – if there is a fight in here, she will not be the only ones protecting the children” She smiled as Sirius gave her a hug.

“Thank you, Poppy”

“You are most welcome” She turned as four aurors came in to the room “You should see that Mr Krum and Miss Lovegood get back to their dorms. I am sure they are tired”

xoxox

"You can't be serious" Fudge jumped to his feet, staring at the Headmaster "You really think that we should keep the return of Voldemort from the public?"

"Yes, Minister, I do" Dumbledore replied in a calm voice "At the moment, Voldemort believes that only Harry, Sally and Hermione know the truth. And that, given Mr Potter's reputation for dark magic, very few people will be inclined to believe him if he starts talking"

"So?"

"So if Voldemort continues to believe that the only people who know about his return are three students, he might let his guard down. He might not feel compelled to act, or to start killing" Dumbledore smiled "The time we gain from this could be the difference between victory and defeat"

"But what if you are wrong?" Fudge asked "If we let people now know, then they can maybe start to prepare themselves for Death Eater attacks. If we don't tell them, we are leaving them virtually defenceless"

"I believe that the benefits from the first outweigh the risks of the second" Dumbledore replied.

"No" Fudge shook his head "You don't believe that. You would never knowingly risk innocent lives, unless it was for a better reason than that" He sat down opposite the Headmaster "What aren't you telling me?"

"The prophecy" Dumbledore sighed "Harry is the only one that can defeat Voldemort, Cornelius, and he isn't ready. We need to give him as much time as we can before we force Voldemort's hand, otherwise he won't stand a chance" Fudge stared at the Headmaster for a few moments, wondering what Dumbledore would do if he knew the truth. Would he force Harry to face Voldemort at once? Would he even believe the truth?

"Very well" Fudge said in a measured tone "For the moment, I will make some discrete inquiries about the activities of the twelve. But if it shows anything that the DMLE can act on, then I will tell them what's going on"

"Cornelius..." Dumbledore implored.

"Enough, Albus" Fudge stood up again "I will listen to your advice, but this is not your decision. You didn't want to be Minister, remember?" He turned and left the office.

xoxox

The next morning, when Sirius returned to the hospital wing, he was relieved to see Harry sitting up and chatting with Susan. He walked over and sat down on the bed.

"So – you are feeling better then?"

"Much" He smiled, and hugged his uncle. Sirius hugged him back, then looked around "The girls are still asleep?"

"They had a hard day yesterday" Harry said softly. Sirius stared at him in surprise "What?"

"You were kidnapped, stabbed and tortured, and you think they had a hard day?"

"Yeah" Harry nodded "Because while all that was going on, they had to stand and do nothing about it" He wiped his eyes "I think that was harder than anything I had to go through" Sirius smiled at him, and Susan leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"You are your mother's son" She said with a smile.

"So I've been told" Harry replied, then his face turned serious "So – what's going on?"

"Dumbledore has decided to close the school two weeks early, as a mark of respect. The feast will be held tonight, and everyone will be going home tomorrow" He paused "Although it will be more of a wake than a feast, from what I gather"

"How is everyone taking it?"

"Hufflepuff house has gone in to mourning. They aren't talking to anyone" He sighed "Cho is doing the same"

"And Voldemort's return?"

"No mention of it" He saw his nephew frown "I know. But Cornelius sent me an owl, and explained what was going on" He outline the

meeting the Minister had had with Dumbledore “So, while I don't entirely agree, I can see what they are trying to do”

“And you don't think I should say anything?”

“Let's see what Cornelius finds first” Sirius replied, then turned as they heard a noise from the bed opposite Harry's “Ah – it seems Miss Granger has decided to join us”

xoxox

“The end of term is usually an occasion for celebration, however tonight we are gathered for a sadder purpose. Cedric Diggory was one of our finest, and he will be sorely missed” Dumbledore stood at the front of The Great Hall, facing all of the students from all three schools “He was taken from us too young, and I am sure we will all remember his spirit during the tournament, as well as the past seven years here at Hogwarts” He paused and looked around, then continued.

“We may never know how, or why, he died, but I would ask you all not to dwell on it. To remember him how he was, flying round the Quidditch pitch, or playing chess in the courtyard” He saw Cho lower her head “So I ask you now to raise your glasses in his memory” He picked up his goblet, and waited until all the students had risen to their feet “Cedric”

“Cedric” Came the echoed response. As it died down, he lowered his goblet, and continued.

“The express will depart at 2pm tomorrow, and your parents have all been owled to expect you at the station at around 6pm. I hope you all can try to enjoy your summer, and I will see you in September”

xoxox

After the feast, the five students returned to Gryffindor Tower.

“Uncle Mike and Susan are going to meet us off the train tomorrow” Harry said “Apparently they have a surprise for all of us”

“Sounds fun” Hermione smiled, then turned to Viktor “You are coming in a week?”



“Yes” The Durmstrang student sighed “I must return to my school, but I will come back” He smiled at Harry “Uncle Mike has said I can stay with them” Hermione turned and glared at her friend.

“And you didn't tell me this why?”

“We only agreed it this morning, and I thought it might be a nice surprise” She smiled.

“You are very sweet” Then she swatted him on the arm “Now don't do it again”

“Yes mistress” Harry smirked, then turned to Luna “You will be there?”

“Of course” She smiled.

“Excellent” Sally beamed, then looked at her watch “I think we should get to bed. It's late, and I am tired”

“Ok” Harry stood up “If you want to go upstairs, Minnie and I can walk Vik and Luna back to their rooms”

“Okay” She kissed him, then watched as the four students walked out the common room. Smiling, she turned and walked up the stairs to her dorm. She pushed the door open, and walked over to her bed.

Her first hint that she wasn't alone was when a beam of green light smashed in to her chest.

## Chapter 16

*(The scene opens on The Great Hall. There is a stage set up at one end, and the rest of the hall is filled with students and parents sat in rows and rows of chairs. There are three microphones set up at the front of the stage, one left, one right, one center. Also there is a huge drum kit directly behind the center microphone)*

*(After a moment, Albus Dumbledore walks to the front of the stage)*

Dumbledore : Ladies and Gentlemen! Boys and Girls! For one night only, I give you, The Lightening Bolts!

*(Harry, Sally, Hermione and Luna walk out on to the stage. Sally is carrying a normal guitar, while Hermione is carrying a bass guitar. Luna and Harry are empty handed, They are arguing)*

Harry : I thought we agreed we weren't going with that name.

Hermione : You agreed. The rest of us – not so much.

Harry : So I am stuck with it?

Hermione : Pretty much, sweetie.

Harry : Okay.

*(Harry goes to the microphone in the center of the stage. Sally goes to the one on the left, while Hermione takes the one on the right, leaving Luna to go to the drums)*

Harry : Thank you all for coming. We are The Lightening Bolts... apparently... and we'd like to play you one of our newer songs.

*(He turns, and faces Luna, who nods, then bashes her drumsticks together eight times, calling out with each bash)*

Luna : One! One! Two! Three! Five! Eight! Thirteen! Twenty One!

*(Hermione, Sally and Luna all start to play, then, after the introduction, the singing starts)*

Harry : If I had a million galleons

Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons

Harry : I'd buy you a house

Sally and Hermione : What? Our very own house?

Harry : If I had a million galleons

Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'd buy you furniture for your house  
Sally and Hermione : Maybe bring back the Mirror of Erised  
Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I would buy you some brooms  
Sally and Hermione : Like some nice reliant 2001s?  
Harry : If I had a million galleons, I'd buy you love

Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'd buy a Quidditch Team for us  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'm sure we could run it without any fuss  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Sally : Maybe we could get the Holyhead Harpies...

*(the music stops)*

Harry : *(spoken)* No! We don't want them. We want The Cannons!  
Hermione : *(spoken)* But... The Cannons suck.  
Harry : *(spoken, in a pretend sad tone)* Oh. Okay. The Harpies then.  
Sally and Hermione : *(spoken)* Yay!

*(the music starts again)*

Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I buy you a house-elf  
Sally : But not a bound house-elf  
Hermione : Cause that's cruel!  
Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'd buy you an exotic pet  
Hermione : Like a pegasus?  
Sally : Or a pygmy puff?  
Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'd buy you the basilisk's remains  
Sally and Hermione : We could make armor out of the skin  
Harry : If I had a million galleons I'd buy you love

Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : We wouldn't have to walk to the store  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons

Harry : We could travel by knight-bus, cause it costs more  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : We wouldn't have to drink Pumpkin juice every day...

*(the music stops)*

Sally : *(spoken)* But I like pumpkin juice  
Harry : *(spoken)* Really?  
Sally : *(spoken)* Yeah. It's much nicer than anything that isn't pumpkin juice.  
Harry : *(spoken)* Really? I can't stand the stuff.  
Sally : *(spoken)* So – go stand in a corner.  
Harry : *(spoken)* Really?  
Sally : *(spoken)* No, not really.

*(there is a pause as they smile at each other)*

Hermione : *(spoken)* Guys? The song?  
Harry and Sally : *(spoken)* Oh yeah *(grinning)* Sorry.

*(the music starts again)*

Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'd buy you a green dress  
Sally and Hermione : But not a real green dress that's cruel  
Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'd buy you some art  
Sally : Like The Fat Lady  
Hermione : Or a Weasley!  
Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : I'd buy you a snorkack!  
Harry, Sally, Luna, Hermione : Cause haven't you always wanted a snorkack?!

Harry : If I had a million galleons I'd buy you love

Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : If I had a million galleons  
Sally and Hermione : If you had a million galleons  
Harry : If I had a million galleons...

*(the music stops)*

Harry : *(spoken)* Oh wait. I do!

*(The crowd goes wild)*

Harry : *(spoken)* Thank you, and good night!

*(The scene fades out)*

xoxox

*(with due acknowledgement to The Barenaked Ladies and The Brobdingnagian Bards)*

## Chapter 17

Luna stared at Harry in complete disbelief.

"When you said you had weird dreams, you really weren't kidding, were you?"

"Nope" Harry smiled.

"Do you think it was one of your prophetic dreams?" She asked.

"God, I hope not" He said with a shiver, then turned as Hermione came down the stairs from the girls' dorms "Good morning Minnie" He looked past her "No Sally?"

"I don't know if she is up yet" Hermione said "When I got back last night, the curtains around her bed were already drawn"

"Okay" Harry stood "I'll go check on her. You two can go to breakfast – we'll catch up with you"

"Okay" Luna and Hermione left the common room, while Harry went up the stairs Hermione had just descended.

xoxox

A minute later, he pushed the door to the fourth year girls' room open, slipped inside and walked across to Sally's bed. Slowly he pushed the curtains open, then frowned.

"Why would she sleep in her clothes?" He said to himself, then he knelt down, and slowly shook her "Hon – you have to wake up now. It's time to go home"

"Huh?" She blinked a few times, then suddenly sat bolt upright, nearly smacking in to his chin as she did "What happened?" She picked up her wand and looked round the room "Where is he?"

"Where is who?" Harry asked, confused.

"Someone cursed me last night" She said, eyes still searching the room "I came in last night, and a green curse hit me" She turned to face him "I didn't see who did it, and I don't remember anything until you woke me, just now"

"Okay" Harry nodded "Do you feel up to coming down to the hospital wing?"

"I think so" She stood up, then sniffed "I think I might need a quick shower, and change of clothes first"

"Okay" He stood up, and started to walk towards the door.

"Accio Towel" There was a pause, and he stopped, and turned back to see Sally try the summoning spell again "Accio Towel!" She turned to him "Nothing's happening!" He lifted his wand.

"Accio Towel!" A pink and blue towel flew out of Sally's trunk towards him. He caught it, then turned to her "Try lighting your wand"

"Lumos!" She said, but the wand remained unlit "LUMOS!"

"I think the shower can wait"

xoxox

"Madam Pomfrey?!" Harry called out as he and Sally ran in to the infirmary "MADAM POMF.."

"I'm here!" The healer came out of her office "Now what is all the yelling about?"

"Sally can't do magic" Harry said, and Sally nodded.

"I tried a summoning spell, then a light spell, and neither worked" She was starting to panic, and her tone was rising with every word.

"Have a seat" Pomfrey said, gesturing to one of the beds "Firstly, if you don't mind, can you let Mr Potter try your wand?" Sally nodded, and Harry took her wand.

"Lumos" The wand lit up, though not very brightly.

"Okay" Harry handed the wand back, then handed his wand to his girlfriend.

"I just guessed it would be the next test" He replied when Pomfrey looked at him curiously.

"Good guess" They both turned to Sally.

"Lumos" She said, but nothing happened "LUMOS!" The wand remained dark, and Sally looked up at the healer "It's me, isn't it?"

"It is a possibility, my dear, but let's not panic" She pulled out her own wand, and ran a diagnostic spell over the young girl. When her wand glowed blue, she frowned, and ran the spell again. When she got the same result a second time, she sighed.

"Tell me" Sally said. Madam Pomfrey looked at her with sympathetic eyes, then sighed again.

"Miss Perks, it appears that your magical core has collapsed" She paused "You aren't a witch any more"

xoxox

Susan stared down at her daughter, resting in the arms of her boyfriend, and sighed.

Quarter of an hour before, Hermione had appeared in her kitchen, and told her she was needed at the school immediately. A few seconds after the bushy-haired girl had vanished, Sirius had stepped through the floo, and asked if he could go with her.

When they had arrived, Luna and Viktor had met them in the entrance hall, and taken them up to the infirmary, where the other three were waiting. Sally, in a cold, emotionless voice, had outlined what had happened, while Hermione and Harry filled in the details. Madam Pomfrey had confirmed her initial diagnoses, with the help of Professor Slughorn, and told them that, short of miracles, there was very little that she could do.

After hearing that, Sally had broken down in tears, and Harry had laid her back on the bed, then laid down next to her, simply holding her while she cried.

"Harry?"

"Yes, Aunt Sue?"

"I am going to speak with the Headmaster" She smiled at the two of them "I will be back in a little while" She turned "Mike?"

"Yes Susan?"



"Will you come with me?"

"Of course" The two of them walked out of the office, and headed towards the Headmaster's office.

"So – who did this?" She asked him as they walked.

"I don't know" He thought about it "But it has to be someone from the school"

"Because no one else can get in to the dorms?" She asked. He nodded "Moody?"

"Could be" He replied, then they stopped as they came to the gargoyle outside Dumbledore's office "Any ideas?"

"One or two" She stared up at the grotesque shape "Are you going to let us in, or do I have to blast you in to little bits?" There was pause, then the door pulled back "Seems my daughter isn't the only one who can bend the rules once in a while" The two adults walked up the stairs, and pushed the door open.

"Mrs Perks. Mr Black. What can I do for you today?" Dumbledore asked, not commenting on the manner of their entrance.

"Last night, my daughter was attacked in Gryffindor Tower" Susan said in a calm voice.

"Attacked?" Dumbledore stood up "Is she alright?"

"No" Sirius replied "The attack left her with no magical core – she is now a muggle"

"Good god"

"Well put" Susan sat down and stared up at him "I want you to find out who did this, and turn whoever is responsible over to the DMLE"

"Of course" He paused "But with the students leaving today, it might be hard to check each wand..."

"Then lock the school down" Sirius yelled "Before someone can leave, you make them turn their wand over for inspection" Dumbledore stared at him for a moment, then nodded.

"Okay. I will have it set up for when the carriages are due to leave"

"Good" Susan said "Now, if you will excuse me, I am going to go back to my daughter"

"Mrs Perks..."

"What?"

"I realise that this is not the best time, but there is something we have to discuss"

"What?"

"If your daughter can't be cured, you are aware that she won't be able to return to school next year" He looked at her in surprise when she laughed at him "Mrs Perks..."

"Do you really think I would let Sally return here after today?" She stared down at him in disbelief "Even if my daughter were the most powerful mage in the world I would not let her back in to this school"

"I understand that you are upset, but..."

"Upset?" She held up her hand, and started counting off on her fingers "Professor Quirrell. Lucius Malfoy. Severus Snape. Alastor Moody" She waved her hand "Four Death Eaters, Dumbledore. Four Death Eaters have been in this school since Sally's first year, and you have done nothing about them. That's not even mentioning that utter tool Lockheart and the basilisk that nearly killed every student here" She waved her hand in dismissal "I am withdrawing Sally from Hogwarts, as of today, and – if, on the off chance that Madam Pomfrey is wrong, she will be enrolled elsewhere, or I will teach her at home" Dumbledore gazed at her for a few moments, then turned to Sirius.

"Mr Black?"

"Yes, Professor Dumbledore?"

"Do you feel the same way?" Sirius paused for a moment, hearing the nervousness in the Headmaster's voice. He was tempted to prolong the moment for as long as he could, but decided that he had better things to do.

"Harry and I have not discussed it yet, Headmaster" He paused "I will let you know"

"He has to return! Surely you under..."

"I said, I will let you know" Sirius said firmly "Will that be all?" For a moment, he thought that Dumbledore was going to attack him, but in the end the Headmaster simply nodded "Thank you"

xoxox

"Luna?"

"Yes, Aunt Sue?"

"Where are our children?"

xoxox

"Did Myrtle say why we are here?" Sally asked as Harry lead them down to The Chamber.

"She said that we have someone to meet, and that if we don't meet them today, then we might not get another chance" The ghostly school-girl had been to visit them in the infirmary, and told them they were needed in The Chamber.

"And you don't think this is some sort of practical joke?" Sally asked "Just as an attempt to cheer me up?"

"I don't think so" Hermione said, her tone full of awe.

"Why not?" Harry asked. He turned to face her, but realised she wasn't staring at him.

"Because of them" Hermione said, raising her hand and pointing towards the end of The Chamber. Both Harry and Sally turned, and realised just why Hermione was speaking with such awe.

"Why do we always get this reaction?" The ghost of Rowena Ravenclaw asked "Do we look that scary?"

"Well – maybe Salazar" Helga replied with a smirk.

"Hey!"

xoxox

"I have an appointment to see Minister Fudge"

"He isn't here at the moment" The secretary checked his diary "He should be back in the office at 4 o'clock this afternoon. Would you be able to return then?"

"Yes"

xoxox

"So, you are The Four Founders?" Sally asked.

"Yes"

"And not The Three Stooges?"

"Hey! Show some respect" Salazar tried to glare at her, but, since the other three ghosts were laughing, the effect was kind of spoiled.

"I think we should keep this one" Helga said with a smile "She's fun" Sally blushed, then looked at the other two students.

"Aren't you going to say anything?"

"Sorry" Hermione shook her head "I am still getting used to the fact we are talking with four of the greatest wizards and witches in history" She stared at them for a moment longer, then shrugged "Okay - I am over it"

"Good to hear it" Rowena said "And you, Mr Potter?"

"I am over it as well" Harry sighed "Don't get me wrong, I am suitably impressed, but in the past forty eight hours I have been used in a dark ritual, tortured by Voldemort, and seen my girlfriend stripped of her magic, so – my emotional roller-coaster is pretty much parked in neutral"

"It is that we wish to talk to you about" Godric said "If you would like to take a seat..." He waved his hand, and three chairs appeared behind them "Then I will begin"

xoxox

“Luna?”

“Yes, Uncle Mike?”

“Would it be possible to have a meeting with your father?”

“Of course” Luna nodded “May I ask why?”

“You know that Dumbledore wants to suppress the story about Voldemort's return?”

“Yes” She frowned “Though I don't believe he is doing it for the right reason”

“You and me both” Sirius smirked “But, if it becomes necessary, we might need to find a way round Dumbledore's nefarious plans. And do you know what would be useful in that endeavour?”

“A flying pony?” Sirius shook his head.

“A spell to turn Dumbledore in to a garden gnome?” Sirius thought about it for a moment, then shook his head.

“A newspaper run by a member of a top-secret order?” Sirius smiled, and nodded.

“Okay. I will talk to him when I get home”

“Thank you” He looked around “Did the kids say when they would be back?”

xoxox

“Last year, Vanessa told you that you had a destiny” Helga said “She was right. It is your destiny that you – all three of you – will defeat the last true heir of The Founders”

“Voldemort” Sally said. Salazar nodded.

“My descendant has wandered off the path, and, as much as it pains me to say it, he has to be dealt with, otherwise the world will suffer for it”

“I'm sorry” Hermione said, and the ghost of Slytherin smiled at her.

"Thank you, Miss Granger"

"Why us?" Sally asked, turning to Helga "We are... no one" She glanced at Harry "Well – two of the three of us are no one"

"Are you sure about that, Miss Perks?" Godric asked with a slight smile. He turned to Hermione "Miss Granger is quite possibly the smartest witch of her generation, and, once she has finished school, it is no exaggeration to say that she may well hold the future of the wizarding world in the palm of her hand" Hermione blushed, then looked at Sally "Ah – Miss Perks" Godric turned to one of his companions "I think I will let my good friend explain this"

"Sally-Ann Perks" Helga said "Do you know how many students have switched houses since we founded this school?"

"Eight hundred?" Sally asked hopefully, but Helga shook her head.

"Not quite" She paused "It was four"

"Four hundred?"

"No" Helga smiled again "Just four" She paused "Including you" She saw Sally staring at her "To give you some idea, there are around thirty five new students each year, and, next year will be 1100 years since we opened the doors" She glanced at Rowena "I am sure your daughter can work out the numbers"

"Nearly forty thousand students" Hermione said "And only four switches?"

"So you can see why you gained our attention" Helga smiled "You are loyal, brave and true, and you, along with Miss Granger and Mr Potter, are going to change the world" She saw the look of surprise on Sally's face "Whether you regain your magic or not" There were a few minutes of silence, then Hermione raised her hand.

"Miss Granger?" Salazara stared at her.

"Vanessa?"

"Pardon me?"

"You founded the school nearly eleven hundred years ago"

“Yes”

“And you created The Sorting Hat when you opened the school?”

“Yes” Rowena smiled, realising where she was going.

“Then how did you name The Hat after a character in a book that wasn't released until nearly eight centuries after you died?” She stared at them “Can you travel in time?”

“No” Rowena shook her head “We gave Vanessa – or Hecate, as we first named her – a mind of her own. She decided to change her name every so often, to stop her from getting bored”

"Wouldn't you if your mother had named you Hecate?" Salazar asked with a smirk. Godric glared at him, then continued.

“She took the name Vanessa in honour one of her favourite pupils” He waited to see if Hermione understood.

“Oh my” The Four Founders smiled at them, then their faces turned serious.

“I know that it all seems dark at the moment, especially for you, my daughter” Helga said “But trust in yourselves, and in the friends you have chosen, and we promise you – there is nothing you can not handle” She, and the other three ghosts, took a step back, and bowed to the three students. A moment later, they vanished.

xoxox

Half an hour later, they returned to the Gryffindor common room, to find Susan waiting for them.

“I take it you have been doing something fun?” She asked.

“Yes, mother” Sally replied with a smile “But we will tell you about it when we get home” She and her mother stared at each other for a moment, then Susan nodded.

“Okay. You need to get packed – carriages leave in about twenty minutes” She sat down, then looked up as she realised they were staring at her “Unless you want me to help?”

xoxox

Cornelius Fudge looked up as the door to his office opened.

“Ah – thank you for...”

“Avada Kedavra!”

xoxox

“You met The Founders?” Luna asked “What were they like?”

“Actually – if you discount the talking in riddles, they were pretty much like us” Harry replied with a smile “It's kind of disturbing”

“Why?” Luna stared at them.

“They are The Founders”

“And you three, apparently, hold the future of the wizarding world in your hands” She smirked “It's possible that, in a thousand years, you will be as revered as The Founders are” She laughed at the expression on their faces “But setting aside your future mythical status, what do you think Uncle Mike and Aunt Sue want to talk to us about?”

xoxox

Susan floo'ed to The White House, and found Sirius reading the paper. He looked up.

“Sue?”

“Cornelius has been murdered”

xoxox

“Wow”

“I know”

“I can hardly believe it”

“It's like hell has frozen over”

“What is?” Sirius, Susan, Clare, Arnold and Eric were stood, waiting for their assorted children.



“Well – we managed to go the whole train journey without being bothered by a member of The Weasley Family”

“Wow” Sirius said with a smirk “That is impressive” Susan turned and glared at him “Sorry Sue”

“Mum?” Sally stared at the five adults, realising how serious they all looked “What's wrong?”

“Minister Fudge was murdered this afternoon” She said “We don't know by who, nor why, but we suspect it is because he was going to investigate the twelve names” Before any of the children could respond, Sirius continued.

“After we got the news, we – the five of us – decided to take some drastic measures to ensure your safety”

“What were they?”

“All of our houses are now under Fidelius Charm, with the various owners being the secret keepers” He held his hand up to stop Hermione asking the question he knew she would ask “We will explain all of this later, but we need to get you home” He looked around “We are going directly to The White House, and we can send you home from there”

“Okay” Harry replied.

xoxox

“Mum?”

“Yes Sal?”

“I want to call an Order meeting for this time next week”

“Yes dear”

xoxox

A week later, Harry, Hermione and Sally stood at the front of Sally's living room, and looked around. With the exception of Cornelius, every member of The Order Of V was present. When everyone had quietened down, Harry and Hermione looked at Sally, who nodded.

"Four years ago, Vanessa said that there was a coming storm. That evil would wake, and shake the world to its very foundations. As you know, she was right. Voldemort has returned, and already there are casualties. Cedric and Cornelius might have been the first to die, but they will not be the last before this war is over" She turned to Hermione.

"But Vanessa also said that Three Lions would stand forth to fight the darkness. She was right about that as well. In the past four years, we have fought Voldemort three times, and each and every time we have come away victorious. We are under no illusions that this will be easy, nor do we think that it will be quick. However we do believe that, with your help, we can win this war, and vanquish Voldemort once and for all" Hermione stepped back, and Harry moved to the middle.

"We already have a plan, but it will require all of you to help carry it out" He glanced at his girlfriend, then at Luna's father "We have to get Sally's magic back, and we have to let the public know what is going on" He turned to Clare and Arnold, then to Myrtle "We have to try to protect those who can't defend themselves, and the students of Hogwarts who might become a target"

"So – what is the plan?" Sirius asked. Harry turned, and gestured for Sally to come forward again.

"It really is simple" She said, holding up a list of fourteen names "We find each person on this list, and we kill them. We wipe out his support, one by one, until there is nothing and no one left. And then, when he is beaten, broken, friendless and alone, we hunt him down, and we obliterate him from the face of the earth" There was a long period of silence "Are there any questions?"